ASPEN MLT Inc.

VOL. 1

COLLECTED

MINDFIELD

ASPEN

VOL. 1

#0

COVER A

MINDFIELD

ASPEN MLT Inc.

VOL. 1

#0

COVER B

MINDFIELD

MINDFIELD™

HEAD GAMES

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MINDFIELD

CREATED BY J.T. KRUL

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I used to like cities. The sights, the sounds, the people. The constant energy humming in my ear.

The urban hearbeat. A sign of life itself.

But now that energy works against me.

I try to shut it all out. Try to find some solace. It's a losing battle.

eet Statio

4 5 6

7

n & Brooklyn

No matter what I do, I still feel them all around me.

I don't see their faces, but I know their secrets.

And I f***ing hate that.

Filthy, ugly, putrid.

They spew their mental vomit at me.

It seeps through my pores. Digs into my skull.

Their misery reaches out, looking to poison… to infect… to consume.

If only I could get away.

Escape to some remote place.

But I know the truth.

There is no escape.

This is my life.

eparture Gates

Stationed along a watchtower.

Baggage Claim
Ground Transportation

Searching for the jokers and the thieves.

Trying to find some relief.

HEY, BOB DYLAN--

--HOW ABOUT YOU FOCUS ON THE TASK AT HAND?

YOU'RE THE ONE WHOSE GOT HER NOSE BURIED IN THAT GOSSIP RAG. NO WONDER I KEEP GETTING FLASHES OF DENZEL IN HIS SWIM TRUNKS.

WHAT? YOU GOTTA PROBLEM WITH A BROTHER BEING A SEX SYMBOL?

NOT AT ALL. I'M JUST MORE OF A WILL SMITH MAN MYSELF.

Erika and I are partners. Not in the biblical sense, but the agency sense.

We have one job and one job only.

Security.

SO, YOU EVER GETTING BACK AROUND THIS WAY?

NOT IF I CAN HELP IT.

LUCY, STOP THAT!

HOW ABOUT A LITTLE HELP, GARY?

LISTEN TO YOUR MOTHER, HONEY.

SUCK IT, DEMONS!

TSA

Picking up what the rest of the world misses.

WHO'S MY GOOD LITTLE BABY?

Seeing what they can't.

PLEASE STOP LOOKING AT ME.

A thought police--

BREATHE... TWO... THREE... FOUR...

Literally.

Krrgh!

There.

YOU WILL SEE-- SEE WHAT IT IS LIKE TO LIVE AND DIE IN *FEAR!*

THE SUIT. THREE O'CLOCK.

I SAW. I'M ON HIM. A HIJACKER. NOT VERY ORIGINAL.

I GUESS THE CLASSICS NEVER GO OUT OF STYLE.

WE'LL TAKE HIM TOGETHER.

FORGET IT, I GOT THIS FOOL.

ERIKA, WAIT...

Crap.

BETTER DEACTIVATE WHATEVER'S INSIDE. HE MIGHT HAVE A REMOTE TRIGGER. AND BE CAREFUL.

I KNOW WHAT I'M DOING.

FAMOUS LAST WORDS.

OUTTA THE WAY! MOVE! LOOKOUT!

Screw this.

GIVE IT UP, LOSER.

WITHOUT YOUR BRIEFCASE, YOU COULDN'T HIJACK AN EXTRA BAG OF PEANUTS.

THAT'S WHAT YOU THINK. THE BRIEFCASE WAS JUST A *DECOY*.

I'M THE *PACKAGE*--

--LOSER.

DAMMIT.

SHNNNK

<LANGLEY, VIRGINIA.
C.I.A. TERMINAL
SIMULATION CENTER.>>

BZZZ

I GUESS I SHOULD BE HAPPY CONNOR ONLY GOT HIMSELF KILLED THIS TIME AROUND.

BUT WITH ONLY A HANDFUL OF AGENTS IN THIS PROGRAM, WE CAN'T AFFORD LOSING ONE SO EASILY.

WE'VE INVESTED TOO MUCH IN THEIR SAD LITTLE MINDS.

ESPECIALLY CONNOR, SIR. HE'S THE MOST EFFECTIVE TEST SUBJECT IN *COBALT.*

WHAT ABOUT ERIKA?

SHE'S A BETTER PROTO- TYPICAL FIELD AGENT. HIGHER PROFICIENCY IN HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT AND WEAPONS TRAINING.

BUT CONNOR'S SHOWN THE MOST COGNITIVE SKILLS AND EFFECTIVE PRIMARY PERCEPTION QUOTIENT.

PROJECT COBALT

I'D LIKE TO CUT AND PASTE THEIR SORRY ASSES. PUT TOGETHER ONE SOLID OPERATIVE.

CAN'T WAIT FOR PERFECTION THOUGH, WE NEEDED THESE GUYS OUT IN THE FIELD A YEAR AGO.

SIR, I'M AFRAID THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATIONS ARE STILL PROVING PROBLEMATIC. SO FAR, NOT ONE AGENT HAS BEEN CLEARED FOR OPERATIONAL STATUS.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT. I'LL GET THEM CLEARED FOR DUTY.

EVEN IF I HAVE TO WRITE THE DAMN REPORTS MYSELF.

NOT A BAD WAY FOR WANNABE ACTORS TO SPEND THEIR TIME, I GUESS.

DO YOU THINK THEY WOULD VOLUNTEER FOR THIS SIMULATION, IF THEY KNEW WHAT *WE* WERE CAPABLE OF?

PROBABLY NOT.

WOULD YOU HAVE SIGNED ON FOR THE PROGRAM, IF *YOU* KNEW WHAT WE'D BE CAPABLE OF?

GOOD POINT.

AIN'T NO BIG SURPRISE THOUGH. ALWAYS KNEW THE WORLD WAS SH*T. THE ONLY DIFFERENCE IS NOW WE GOT THE PROOF.

YEAH...

DAMN, *IGNORANCE* WAS BLISS.

TO BE CONTINUED
MINDFIELD #1 • 06 • 16 • 10

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AN INSIDE JOB

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<MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY.>>

HOW CAN I **REACH** YOU? HOW CAN I GET **THROUGH** TO YOU?

IN ATTEMPTING TO COMMUNICATE-- TO CONNECT WITH YOU ON A HUMAN LEVEL-- I AM **TRAPPED** USING WORDS THAT ONLY SERVE TO **ESTRANGE** US FROM OUR SPECIES.

NATIONALITY. RELIGION. POLITICAL AFFILIATION. WE THINK THESE MARKERS MEAN SOMETHING, BUT THEY DO NOT.

THE **ESTABLISHMENT**-- CALL IT SOCIETY, GOVERNMENT, OR CIVILIZATION-- HAS TRAINED US TO DEFINE OURSELVES BY OUR ENVIRONMENT. OUR CLOTHES, CARS, FOOD, SPORTS TEAMS, TASTES IN ART, MUSIC, AND POP CULTURE.

THROUGH THESE FICTITIOUS FILTERS, THEY CONTROL US. THEY HAVE CHANGED US FROM HUMAN BEINGS INTO CONSUMERS. IS THIS TRULY THE NEXT STEP IN OUR EVOLUTION? IS THIS OUR DESTINY? OUR FATE?

AND FOR THOSE WHO WOULD DARE OPPOSE THIS GROTESQUE ABOMINATION OF OUR SPIRIT, WE STAND AGAINST A **JUGGERNAUT**-- ONE THAT MONITORS OUR EVERY MOVE.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS AT BIRTH, COMPLETE CREDIT CARD HISTORY, REGIONAL SURVEILLANCE, UNLIMITED WIRETAPPING, GLOBAL POSITIONING SATELLITES...

...THEIR REACH IS ENDLESS. **THEY** ARE WATCHING.

In the 1970's, the CIA began the Scanate program…

…Designed to explore the concept of remote viewing and it's potential use in intelligence gathering.

Through these techniques, test subjects were capable of tapping into their minds to identify targets of interest around the world.

Often with remarkable accuracy.

Still remote viewing was, by far, the most successful psychic espionage enhancement program to date.

It wasn't the CIA's first leap into the world of psychic warfare. They had been tinkering with the human mind since the birth of LSD and the legendary MK:Ultra program of the 1950's.

But that was then. This is now.

ERIKA, YOU GETTING THIS? I COUNT FOUR.

<THE TIMERS MUST BE SYNCHRONIZED...>*

<...OR THE AMERICANS WILL CLOSE THE SYSTEM AFTER THE FIRST EXPLOSION...>

SAME HERE, CONNOR. WHAT DO YOU HAVE KASEEM?

<...AND WE'LL WASTE THE OTHER OPPORTUNITIES.>

<WE MUST HURRY.>

THERE SHOULD BE FIVE. WE'RE MISSING ONE.

I FOUND HIM. HE'S ON THE CRAPPER.

ERIKA, TAKE A PEEK. MAYBE YOU'LL LIKE WHAT YOU SEE.

DOUBT IT, ISAAC.

OKAY. LET'S DO THIS.

*<TRANSLATED FROM ARABIC.>

636

FREEZE!

<ON THE GROUND. NOW!>

NO! YOU STOP, OR WE ALL *DIE*.

KASEEM?

I'M ON IT.

OKAY, FRIEND. SHOW ME WHAT YOU GOT.

WE'RE CLEAR. IT'S LACKING TWO NECESSARY CONNECTIONS.

H-HOW DID YOU KNOW?

ALLAHU AKBAR!

IF YOU SAY SO.

WHAT THE HELL, ISAAC?!?

YOU SAID IT WASN'T ARMED.

THAT DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN SHOOT IT.

THAT'S FOUR. I'LL TAKE CARE OF NUMBER FIVE.

HE WENT OUT THE WINDOW!

I GOT'EM!

DAMN.

ISAAC...?

I *SAID*, I GOT'EM!

WHAT'S THE STORY?

IT'S A FOOT RACE.

MY MONEY'S ON *ISAAC*. THAT BOY CAN *MOVE*.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT THAT ONE. HE'S NEUTRALIZED.

MAYBE...

...BUT HE'S STILL ALIVE.

GGRGGLE

The mind is always strongest when the end is near. The signal radiates like a final blast of psychic energy.

Memories crystallize.

Thoughts clarify.

I'm not saying I agree. Not at all. He wanted to kill thousands.

But I guess I understand.

God, I hate this part of the job.

YOU'RE ONLY MAKING THIS HARDER ON YOURSELF.

GIVE IT UP!

TCHT

TCHT

FINE... HAVE IT YOUR WAY.

DON'T BE A BUTTHEAD

SMOKING TODAY

BOO-YAH!

:GAAAAKKK!:

GOD, I LOVE THIS PART OF THE JOB.

--IS BEING HAILED AS A MAJOR BREAKUP OF A TERRORIST THREAT.

F.B.I. OFFICIALS-- WHATEVER.

ACCORDING TO F.B.I. OFFICIALS, FIVE SUSPECTS WERE IN THE PROCESS OF CONSTRUCTING SEVERAL EXPLOSIVE DEVICES WITH INTENT TO DETONATE THEM IN NEW YORK'S SUBWAY SYSTEM--

LOOK AT THEM STRUTTING AROUND IN THEIR WINDBREAKERS. THEY DIDN'T DO A DAMN THING BUT PICK UP THE PHONE WHEN *WE* CALLED'EM.

THEY COULD HAVE AT LEAST INCLUDED ONE *MIDDLE EASTERNER* FROM THE BUREAU FOR THE *PHOTO-OP.*

IT LOOKS LIKE THE *ARYAN RACE* IS BRINGING IN THE *SONS OF ALLAH.*

POSERS. IT'S LIKE MY OLD ASSIGNMENT. WE DO THE DIRTY WORK-- GET THE JOB DONE-- AND SOMEONE ELSE TAKES ALL THE CREDIT.

I THOUGHT NAVY *SEALS* WEREN'T ABOUT THE GLORY?

STICK WITH YOUR *BOOK,* CONNOR. I WASN'T TALKING TO YOU.

THEN WHO *WERE* YOU TALKING TO?

I ASSUME HIS ANIMOSITY IS DIRECTED AT ME, ERIKA.

ISAAC, I HAD NO IDEA THE COVERT NATURE OF THIS PROGRAM WOULD UPSET YOUR GENTLE SENSIBILITIES.

NOW...

...I KNOW THIS EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN AN ORDEAL FOR ALL OF YOU-- PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY. BUT THIS IS WHAT *PROJECT COBALT* IS ALL ABOUT. LAST NIGHT WAS OUR FIRST FIELD OPERATION, AND YOU DIDN'T DISAPPOINT. YOU SAVED COUNTLESS LIVES.

YET, YOU ALL LOOK LIKE A BUNCH OF *MOODY* BASTARDS.

WOULD IT HELP IF I TOLD YOU WE GOT A CALL FROM SECRETARY OF STATE HARPER?

HE CONVEYED THE *PRESIDENT'S* SINCEREST APPRECIATION FOR THE CIA'S EFFORTS.

NO?

HOW ABOUT THE FACT THAT I'M GIVING YOU ALL THE NIGHT OFF?

CONSIDER IT AN EVENING *FURLOUGH*. ENJOY SOME DOWN TIME. *CELEBRATE*.

BUT BE READY TO GO IN THE MORNING, BECAUSE WE'VE GOT A *LOT* MORE WORK AHEAD OF US.

LAST NIGHT WAS ONLY THE *BEGINNING*.

HEY, *DYLAN*. YOU GOING TO JOIN US FOR A NIGHT ON THE TOWN? YOU'RE PART OF THE TEAM TOO-- OUR *MIND'S EYE* IN THE SKY.

I WORK FOR MCMANUS. I'M *NOT* PART OF THIS LITTLE *EXPERIMENT*, AND I PLAN ON KEEPING IT THAT WAY.

YOU FORGOT TO HAND IN MY *SKETCHES* AT THE DEBRIEFING.

COULD I HAVE THEM, PLEASE?

UM..SURE. HERE YOU GO.

THANK YOU.

WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH THEM?

I STUDY THEM FROM TIME TO TIME. IT HELPS ME PROCESS MY PROCESS. I DON'T HAVE MAGIC PILLS TO DO THE JOB FOR ME. I ACTUALLY HAVE TO WORK AT IT.

TRAIN MY MIND. STAY *SHARP*.

NOW THAT'S WHAT I'M TALKIN' 'BOUT! WE *WORK* HARD, WE *PLAY* HARD. RIGHT KASEEM?

I LIKE THE SOUND OF THAT.

PROCESS MY PROCESS?

WHAT A *JACKASS*.

I'D CUT HIM SOME SLACK. DYLAN'S BEEN REMOTE VIEWING FOR THE AGENCY FOR TWENTY YEARS.

THAT'S A LONG TIME LIVING IN YOUR *HEAD*. WE'VE ONLY JUST STARTED.

TAKE A GOOD LOOK, ERIKA-- BECAUSE *THAT'S* WHAT WE HAVE TO LOOK FORWARD TO.

IF WE EVEN MAKE IT THAT LONG.

When the witching hour arrives…

…We must take our medicine or risk falling completely into the abyss.

None of us know exactly what's inside-- something McManus had the lab boys come up with.

What Dylan calls our magic pills-- we just call the Cobalt Blues.

A cerebral concoction of LSD, peyote, and every other hallucinogenic under the sun-- or over the rainbow, I suppose.

The funny thing is I avoided the whole drug scene altogether when I was younger. In college, I was strictly a keg man. I never took an interest in the heavy stuff.

Now look at me. The C.I.A. Changed my life. They made me a user. An addict.

A pill-popping, mind-reading freak.

Wonder if JFK knew that's what the government had in mind when he asked what we could do for our country?

IT'S SO LOUD IN HERE. I CAN BARELY HEAR MYSELF THINK.

ALWAYS GOOD TO WORK ON OUR *BLOCKING* EXERCISES.

BLOCKERS? ARE YOU KIDDING? SOAK IT ALL IN, THAT'S WHAT I SAY.

YOU'RE AN *IDIOT.*

AW, WHY YOU ALWAYS GOTTA *HATE?*

BECAUSE YOU DRAGGED US TO THIS OVER-DRESSED, OVER-PRICED DIVE FULL OF *BOTTOM-FEEDERS.*

WE'VE BEEN BOTTLED UP FOR MONTHS IN OUR PRISON.

WE COULD ALL USE SOME... *RELEASE.* YOU'LL BE THANKING ME LATER.

HOW 'BOUT IT, KASEEM? SEE ANYTHING YOU LIKE?

I'M MUCH MORE OUTGOING *ONLINE.* MOST OF THESE WOMEN ARE OUT OF MY LEAGUE.

OUT OF YOUR LEAGUE?

LITTLE MAN, YOU CAN READ THEIR MINDS. YOU TELLIN' ME YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO CLOSE THE DEAL? THE DECK IS TOTALLY STACKED IN OUR FAVOR. IT'S VEGAS AND YOU'RE THE RAIN MAN.

THAT GOES FOR YOU TOO, ERIKA.

I DON'T *NEED* TELEPATHY TO KNOW WHAT GOES ON IN A *GUY'S* MIND.

THIS NIGHT OUT SOUNDED A LOT MORE APPEALING BEFORE I KNEW IT WAS ONLY AN EXCUSE FOR SOME *MITIGATED* TEAM BUILDING. NO OFFENSE.

NONE TAKEN.

TO BE HONEST, I'M NOT EVEN SURE I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO IT IN THE FIRST PLACE.

I DON'T LIKE CROWDS.

HOW IS IT THAT YOU SEEM TO MANAGE IT SO EASILY?

I DON'T.

YOU SURE MAKE IT *LOOK* THAT WAY.

YOU'RE JUST MORE *SENSITIVE* THAN THE REST OF US.

WAS THAT A *DIG?*

NORMALLY, YES.

CONNOR, WE ALL KNOW YOU'RE THE MOST *ACCOMPLISHED* TELEPATH IN THE GROUP. ONLY SERVES, YOU'D BE WOUND THE *TIGHTEST.*

MCMANUS IS RIGHT. NO MATTER WHAT WE'VE BEEN THROUGH, WE SAVED LIVES. THAT'S GOTTA COUNT FOR SOMETHING. IT'S WHAT WE VOLUNTEERED FOR-- TO MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE.

BUT WE ALL HAD OUR *REASONS* FOR SIGNING ON FOR THIS PROGRAM. WHATEVER THEY DO TO US, WHATEVER CHANGES-- THAT MOTIVATION WILL ALWAYS BE THERE.

YOU SAYING THAT SOMEDAY WE'LL LOOK BACK ON ALL OF THIS AND KNOW THAT IT WAS WORTH IT?

MAYBE. MAYBE NOT.

"What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish?

"Son of man,
you cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images,
where the sun beats,
and the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,

"and the dry stone no sound of water."

It's Eliot's The Wasteland. I don't know what it means, and that's the point. Focusing on memorized passages helps me keep the other minds at bay.

It provides a level of interference. That's my blocker.

But somehow things still worm their way through.

HEY!

I don't like touching people if I can help it. It makes it almost impossible not to see them.

It comes into focus like a photo being developed. Out of the blackness…

…a vision emerges.

Seeing is bad enough, but memories carry more than that. They carry sound as well.

She can't scream, but I still hear her. The faint whimpers of a defeated spirit.

Bastard.

AND IF I WERE YOU, I'D KEEP MY MOUTH *SHUT* ABOUT THIS. UNLESS YOU WANT THE WHOLE CAMPUS TO FIND OUT WHAT A *WHORE* YOU ARE.

GET... OUT.

AW, I'M SURE DEEP DOWN-- YOU ENJOYED IT. *VERY* DEEP DOWN.

That smug tone in his voice makes me sick.

He got away with it before.

At least, that's what he thought.

CONNOR!

JESUS, *WHAT* DID YOU DO?

<MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY.>>

SO, WHERE IS IT?

IT'S GOOD TO FINALLY MEET YOU, FACE-TO-FACE.

RIGHT HERE.

TEN THOUSAND AS PROMISED.

SWEET. IT WAS A PIECE OF CAKE. GIVE ME A *CHALLENGE* NEXT TIME.

QUITE THE SETUP YOU GOT HERE.

UH... IF YOU DON'T MIND...? I'M KIND OF PROTECTIVE ABOUT MY SPACE.

WHATEVER, MAN. JUST CURIOUS.

SORRY.

WELL, WE'LL GET OUT OF YOUR WAY.

ENJOY YOUR MONEY.

IF YOU ARE LISTENING TO MY **PODCASTS,** THEN YOU HAVE ALREADY DECIDED THAT **SOCIETY'S** FUTURE IS **NOT** FOR YOU. BUT YOU CANNOT SIT ON THE SIDELINES, **WAITING** FOR SOMETHING TO HAPPEN.

>GAAAK!<

YOU MUST BE **PROACTIVE,** NOT REACTIVE. YOU MUST **ENGAGE** IN THE BATTLE **BEFORE** IT COMES TO YOU.

OTHERWISE, IT WILL BE TOO **LATE.**

To Be Continued: MINDFIELD #2

SUBJECT: CONNOR
SCRIPT: J.T. KRUL
ARTWORK: LORI "CROSS" HANSON
COLORS: SIYA OUM

PROJECT COBALT

SHIELD

PROJECT COBALT DATA FILES

IT'S PRETTY NICE OUT THIS MORNING, SO I THOUGHT I'D TAKE A WALK. I KNOW I'VE BEEN BY A LOT LATELY.

MAYBE THAT'S BECAUSE I DON'T KNOW WHERE ELSE TO BE.

HI, MOM. HI, DAD.

IOLA MASTERS

HOBART MASTERS

HEY, SIS.

YOU HAVE ONE SAVED MESSAGE. TO PLAY MESSAGE, PRESS ONE.

HEY, BUTT-HEAD. NOT PICKING UP, HUH? I'M OFFENDED. YOU'RE PROBABLY JUST SLEEPING THROUGH ANOTHER LECTURE.

WE'RE ON OUR WAY.

R.I.P.

DAD TOOK ONE OF HIS MAGICAL SHORTCUTS, SO WE'RE GONNA BE LIKE AN HOUR LATE.

WHT DON'T YOU TELL CONNOR ABOUT ALL THE TRAFFIC ON THE INTERSTATE?

I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THAT YOU'RE IN *COLLEGE*-- THAT SOMEPLACE ACTUALLY ACCEPTED YOU. AND HERE I THOUGHT THEY HAD STANDARDS. MAKES ME WANT TO RETHINK APPLYING THERE WHEN I GRADUATE.

WE'RE PROUD OF YOU, DEAR.

MOMS SAYS SHE'S PROUD OF YOU. ME, I THINK YOU CAN DO *BETTER.*

I WONDER HOW LONG THIS WILL LET ME RECORD ON YOUR VOICEMAIL. MAYBE I SHOULD JUST KEEP TALKING AND TALKING AND USE UP ALL THE SPACE. BUT REALLY, WHAT OTHER MESSAGES DO YOU NEED BESIDES MINE, RIGHT? I AM *THAT* AWESOME.

I MEAN, IT ONLY MAKES SENSE THAT YOU WOULD--

=CLKT=

END OF MESSAGE. TO ERASE MESSAGE PRESS ONE. TO SAVE MESSAGE PRESS FOUR.

They never made it to the campus.

1983 ~ 1983

Some junk ass pickup truck coming the other way blew a tire and slammed into them-- head first.

That was almost a year ago.

The university gave me a pass for the entire semester-- full credit for my courses. Not that it mattered-- I never went back.

I didn't feel like studying anymore.

OVER DUE

I haven't felt like doing anything since that day.

Eating and breathing is about all I muster up the energy to do. And sometimes, I can't even do that.

TAP INTO THAT EQUITY TODAY. THERE'S NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME--

I'LL TAKE FASHION POLICE FOR 300, ALEX--

TWO, THREE HUNDRED. EMPIRE--

REPORTS STARTED COMING IN ABOUT TWENTY MINUTES AGO. WE'RE...

AND YOU WANT TO BE MY LATEX SALESMAN--?

...STILL TRYING TO PIECE TOGETHER EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED. BUT AS YOU CAN SEE FROM OUR VIDEO, THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF SMOKE COMING FROM THE BUILDING.

WE'RE NOT SURE WHAT KIND OF PLANE IT WAS, BUT IT APPEARED TO BE A LARGE PASSENGER...

...OH, MY GOD. OH, MY GOD.

DID YOU SEE THAT?

ANOTHER PLANE JUST FLEW INTO THE SECOND TOWER...!

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<SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA.>>

YOU NEED TO **STOP** FEELING **SORRY** FOR THEM. THOSE POOR SHAPES THAT **MUTTER** AND **WANDER** ACROSS THIS MODERN LANDSCAPE.

THEY **AREN'T** PEOPLE. THEY ARE **PROPS.** LIKE CARDBOARD CUT OUTS OF WHAT REAL PEOPLE SHOULD LOOK LIKE.

SOME CALL THEM **ZOMBIES**-- BUT THAT WOULD MEAN THEY WERE **LIVING** SPIRITS ONCE UPON A TIME. BUT THEY WEREN'T.

WE CAN'T **HELP** THEM.

WE CAN'T **SAVE** THEM.

WE CAN ONLY SAVE **OURSELVES.**

I KNOW IT MUST BE HARD TO *DESCRIBE* WHAT YOU *SAW* IN YOUR MIND THE OTHER NIGHT, BUT FULL DISCLOSURE IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE *PROGRAM.*

WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THE *CHAIN* OF EVENTS THAT LED TO THE *ATTACK* ON THE MAN IN THE ALLEY.

CONNOR?

Billy Pilgrim… he became slightly unstuck in time…

"The formation flew backwards over a German city that was in flames.*

"The bombers opened their bomb bay doors, exerted a miraculous magnetism which shrunk the fires…

"…gathered them into cylindrical steel containers, and lifted the containers into the bellies of the planes.

"When the bombers got back to their base, the steel cylinders were taken from the racks and shipped back to the United States of America.

"Where factories were operating night and day, dismantling the cylinders, separating the dangerous contents into minerals.

"Touchingly, it was mainly women who did this work.

"The minerals were then shipped to specialists in remote areas.

"It was their business to put them into the ground, to hide them cleverly, so they would never hurt anybody again."

CONNOR?

*FROM KURT VONNEGUT'S SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE.

THIS IS *POINTLESS*. NONE OF US HAS GOT ANY *CLUE* WHAT THESE GUYS ARE REALLY GOING THROUGH.

THE GOOD DOCTOR IS NOTHING BUT A *PUSHER MAN*-- HIS KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT THESE DRUGS ARE DOING IS PURELY *ANALYTICAL*.

IF I MAY-- HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT ABOUT BRINGING IN SOMEONE WHO *DOES* HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH THIS KIND OF *EXPERIMENTATION?*

SUPER IDEA, BRANDON. SHALL WE PLUCK SOME *JUNKIES* OFF THE STREET AND ENLIST THEM TO HELP WITH *NATIONAL SECURITY?*

NO, SIR. BUT THE *C.I.A.* WASN'T THE ONLY ONE EXPERIMENTING WITH *LSD* BACK IN THE DAY.

WE WEREN'T EVEN THE FIRST. THE *CHINESE*, THE *RUSSIANS*... EVERYONE GOT INTO THE GAME.

SUDDENLY, THE JUNKIES ARE LOOKING MORE *APPEALING*.

I WAS ACTUALLY THINKING ABOUT THE *PRIVATE SECTOR*.

HIS NAME IS *RANDALL WRIGHT*. SPENT THE BETTER PART OF THE 60'S AND 70'S IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA, WHERE HE RAN A COMMUNE OUTSIDE THE CITY.

GETTING *HIGH* WITH ALL THE OTHER *DRAFT DODGERS*.

THE F.B.I. MONITORED HIM FOR YEARS. HE NEVER ENGAGED IN ANY *REVOLUTIONARY* ACTIVITIES. BUT HE WAS ONE OF THE PREMIER *ADVOCATES* OF USING LSD FOR *MIND-EXPANSION*.

I'M NOT GOING TO *EXPOSE* MY TEAM TO SOME *TIMOTHY LEARY* BURNOUT, WHO SPENDS HIS DAYS SMOKING WEED AND CONVERTING *GRATEFUL DEAD* BOOTLEGS TO MP3 FILES.

IT'S NOT LIKE THAT. HE HEADS A MAJOR *THINK TANK* HERE IN TOWN-- CONSULTS FOR POLITICIANS AND POLICY MAKERS. YOU SEE-- WE DON'T NEED TO SEE IF HE'LL PLAY BALL WITH US. HE'S ALREADY IN THE *GAME*.

WHAT'S HIS *NAME* AGAIN?

RANDALL WRIGHT. I'M THE FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN OF THE GLOBAL TRUST.

FOR THE PAST FIFTEEN YEARS WE'VE CONDUCTED RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS ON A HOST OF VITAL SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ISSUES-- FROM CRIME AND POVERTY TO EDUCATION AND THE ENVIRONMENT.

AND WHILE I HAVEN'T HAD THE PLEASURE OF WORKING DIRECTLY WITH THE C.I.A. BEFORE, WE HAVE CONSULTED WITH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT ON ISSUES OF NATIONAL SECURITY.

THANKS FOR THE VERBAL BROCHURE, RANDALL, BUT WE'RE NOT HERE TO DISCUSS YOUR ROLE HERE AT THE GLOBAL TRUST.

WE'RE MORE INTERESTED IN YOUR FORMATIVE YEARS.

AS YOU CAN SEE, THE AGE OF AQUARIUS WAS A BUSY TIME FOR EVERYONE. WE KNOW ALL ABOUT YOUR PSYCHIC EXPERIMENTATION.

A REAL JOHNNY APPLESEED YOU WERE.

THAT... THAT WAS A LIFETIME AGO.

WELL-- FUNNY THING ABOUT THE PAST. IT'S ALWAYS THERE.

I'M CONFUSED. ARE YOU HERE TO ARREST ME?

ON THE CONTRARY. WE NEED YOU.

I KNOW YOU'VE HEARD OF THE *MK-ULTRA* PROGRAM. DRUG EXPERIMENTATION TO ASSIST WITH COVERT OPERATIONS AND *ESPIONAGE*. GOD BLESS THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT. LET'S JUST SAY WE'RE DIPPING INTO THAT POOL AGAIN, AND WE NEED SOMEONE WHO HAS *EXPERIENCE* WITH THE SUBSTANCES TO GUIDE OUR AGENTS THROUGH THEIR *JOURNEY*.

YOU CAN THINK OF YOURSELF AS A *PSYCHIC SHAMAN*-- WORKING FOR THE U.S. GOVERNMENT.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU CAME HERE TO SHOW ME HOW YOU *SPIED* ON ME FOR HALF A *DECADE* IN ORDER TO GET ME TO HELP YOU SPY ON OTHER PEOPLE TODAY.

WHAT COULD *POSSIBLY* MAKE YOU THINK I'D EVER *AGREE* TO IT?

YOU'VE BUILT YOURSELF QUITE A LIFE HERE IN D.C., RANDALL. YOU'RE PLUGGED IN-- WORKING TO *CHANGE* THE WORLD FROM THE *INSIDE*.

EASIER TO CHANGE THE *ESTABLISHMENT* IF YOU ARE PART OF IT.

WHICH IS EXACTLY WHY YOU ARE GOING TO DO THE RIGHT THING HERE-- FOR YOUR COUNTRY.

OTHERWISE, I'LL HAVE YOU *OSTRACIZED* FROM THE POLITICAL BELTWAY. *BANISH* YOU TO THE *BLOGOSPHERE*.

SO, LET ME ASK YOU ONE MORE TIME...

...WHAT'S IT GOING TO BE?

I GUESS I'M EITHER *ON* THE BUS OR *OFF* THE BUS.

<MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY.>>

ANOTHER STUDENT FOUND THE *BODY* ABOUT A WEEK AGO.

306

THIS *PUNK* WAS ON OUR *HACKER* WATCH LIST. CALLED HIMSELF THE *MASTER KEY*. MINOR *NUISANCE* AT BEST.

HE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR A SURFACE HIT TO THE *D.O.D. MAINFRAME*-- SOME LOW-LEVEL CONTRACT FILES. NORMALLY, THESE STUNTS ARE JUST FOR *BRAGGING* RIGHTS.

THEN WE FOUND HIM *DEAD* WITH AN ENVELOPE CONTAINING *TEN GRAND*. HE OBVIOUSLY GOT IN OVER HIS HEAD.

COULD BE SOMETHING *BIG*. THAT'S WHY I CALLED YOU. I KNOW THE SPECIFICS OF THE REPORT ARE CLASSIFIED, BUT I HEARD ABOUT YOUR TEAM TAKING DOWN THAT *THREAT* IN MANHATTAN. I HEAR THEY'RE GOOD.

AND I COULD USE *ALL* THE HELP I CAN GET ON THIS ONE.

DON'T WORRY, *TOMPKINS*. MY TEAM IS ALREADY *WORKING* ON IT.

ALL I'M GETTING IS SEX FANTASIES AND FLASHES OF BINGE DRINKING.

IT'S BECAUSE THEY LIVE IN THIS FANTASYLAND, CLUELESS ABOUT THE DANGERS OF THE REAL WORLD. WHAT DID YOU EXPECT?

CONNOR SHOULD HAVE TO BE HERE, SLOGGING THROUGH WITH THE REST OF US. I DON'T GET IT. HE SCREWS UP AND GETS THE DAY OFF?

SCREW UP? HE KILLED A GUY. AND I HAD TO DISPOSE OF THE BODY.

BIG DEAL. I DISPOSED OF DOZENS OF BODIES BACK IN THE DAY.

HIS LITTLE STUNT COST US ANY CHANCE AT ANOTHER NIGHT OUT. HE'S LUCKY I DON'T CRACK HIS SKULL.

KASEEM, YOU'RE BEING AWFULLY QUIET.

LOOK AT THESE GIRLS.

I REALLY SHOULD HAVE STUCK AROUND FOR GRAD SCHOOL.

NOTHING?

NOTHING WORTH REPORTING. THIS KID REALLY WAS AN *INTROVERT*. WE ONLY PICKED UP *GLIMPSES* OF HIM THROUGH *MEMORY MINING*.

PROBABLY GET MORE SIFTING THROUGH HIS *SOCIAL NETWORKING* ACTIVITY.

ACTUALLY, I HAVE ANOTHER IDEA.

LICE LINE

10/31/07

306

HERE IT IS.

THIS *SODA CAN* WAS THE SOURCE OF THE *POISON GAS*. THE LAB HAS ALREADY BEEN OVER IT FOR DNA AND FULL CHEMICAL ANALYSIS.

THAT'S OKAY. WE'VE GOT A FEW *SPECIAL* TESTS WE CAN RUN.

"IS THAT *HIM*?"

to the right of each date.

Sat

YEP. NAME'S *CONNOR.*

HE'S SHOWN *REMARKABLE* RESPONSE, BUT HE'S HAVING TROUBLE COPING WITH THE *PSYCHOTROPIC* COMPONENT.

CONSIDERING THE DOSAGE AND TYPES OF DRUGS YOU ARE PUTTING INTO HIS SYSTEM, I'M SURPRISED HE'S EVEN *COGNITIVE.*

LET'S BE *CLEAR.* ALL YOU NEED TO DO IS HELP HIM QUELL THE *DEMONS* AND GET HIS HEAD BACK ON STRAIGHT SO HE CAN FUNCTION.

YOU'RE *NOT* HIS THERAPIST. YOU GOT ME?

SURE. YOU DON'T WANT TO *FIX* HIS NOGGIN. JUST KEEP IT FROM *CRACKING.*

WELL-- CRACKING ANY *FURTHER.*

SO, YOU'RE *NOT* A *DOCTOR?*

AND YOU'RE *NOT* WITH THE *AGENCY?*

NOPE.

NOPE.

THEN WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING HERE?

I'M HERE TO *HELP.*

I KNOW YOU'VE GOT YOURSELF MEDICATED WITH QUITE THE *DRUG COCKTAIL.* THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I TRIED IT *ALL.* LSD, MARIJUANA, MUSHROOMS, PEYOTE. EVEN TRADITIONAL MALPITTE IN SOUTH AFRICA.

YES, SIR. I WAS A BONAFIDE, CARD-CARRYING *PSYCHONAUT.*

MIND EXPANSION CAN BE A *WONDROUS* THING. BUT IT CAN ALSO BE VERY *CHALLENGING.* FORCE US TO CONFRONT THINGS BETTER LEFT HIDDEN AWAY.

THEY DON'T CALL THEM *BAD TRIPS* FOR NOTHING. AM I *RIGHT?*

AFTER MY FAMILY *DIED,* I WAS *LOST.* WASTING AWAY ON A DAILY BASIS. THEN 9/11 HAPPENED AND... AND I WANTED TO DO *SOMETHING.* I WANTED TO HELP.

AT FIRST THE PROJECT SEEMED LIKE A GREAT *OPPORTUNITY.* THEN THE *NIGHTMARE VISIONS* BEGAN.

It was during one of the weekly sessions.

Instead, I watched as reality imploded on itself.

Tearing away.

Exposing the deep, dark secret.

I received my injection and waited for the strawberry fields.

But they never came.

Everything…

…is nothing.

I'M A LITTLE IN THE *DARK* MYSELF-- NOT KNOWING THE EXACT NATURE OF YOUR TREATMENT'S *AGENDA.*

BUT SUCH VISIONS ARE RATHER *COMMONPLACE* WHEN *EXPLORING* PSYCHIC BOUNDARIES.

THEY ARE?

ABSOLUTELY, CONNOR.

YOUR TETHERS OF *CONNECTIVITY* ARE THE LIFELINES TO *NIRVANA* AND COMPLETE *ENLIGHTENMENT,* BUT THEY CAN ALSO REVEAL THE OTHER SIDE OF THE *SPECTRUM*-- TOTAL *OBLIVION.*

YOU WILL INEVITABLY *DISCOVER* BOTH WHEN *PEELING* AWAY THE LAYERS OF THE HUMAN MIND.

YEAH. WELL, THERE WAS DEFINITELY *PEELING.*

You can see it in Dylan. Whenever he's called upon to RV* an object.

*REMOTE VIEW.

He sits at his chair, turns down the lights, and simply flips a switch.

The C.I.A. did the same thing to us. They reached inside and flipped a switch in us. Only problem is I can't turn it off. None of us can.

Even now, I'm getting flashes from Dylan. I don't want to look. But, it's laying out for me.

Like a train wreck.

I can't help but see.

What he had.

What he lost.

And the empty husk that remains.

<CHICAGO, IL.>>

SO, HOW WE LOOKING?

WORKING ON IT.

SHOULD HAVE STAYED ON THE SIDELINES.

STOP BUGGING ME.

YOU GOT ON FIVE STOPS AGO. YOU CAN'T READ HIM YET?

OKAY, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN-- TIME TO SHOW ME WHAT YOU GOT.

I GOT HIM. ONE ROW BACK, AGAINST THE WINDOW ON THE FAR SIDE.

I KNOW, BUT--

--TOO MANY PEOPLE ON THIS BUS. WHAT IF HE'S GOT MORE POISON GAS?

HE'S NOT THE MARTYR TYPE.

I'M TAKIN' HIM!

NO! WAIT!

HE'S DOWN.

THAT'S GREAT, ISAAC...

STAY AWAY... I'LL SPLATTER HER BRAINS ALL OVER THE BUS!

...HOW ABOUT THE OTHER ONE?

HELP... ME...

ERIKA!

I HEAR YOU.

AND I SEE YOU.

AIIIEEEE!

WHAT'S THE MATTER, SON? WEREN'T YOU BOYS READY TO *DIE* FOR YOUR CAUSE?

"DO NOT *IGNORE* THAT RINGING IN YOUR EAR-- *HEAR* US.

"DO NOT *FIGHT* THAT GNAWING SENSATION IN YOUR STOMACH-- *FEEL* US.

"DO NOT *SHUT* YOUR MIND OFF FROM THE POSSIBILITIES-- *KNOW* US."

REC 0:32:28

ALONE IN NUMBER, UNITED IN PURPOSE.

WE ARE THE *SOLITARY KNIGHTS.*

LUCIEN?

YES, MY DEAR?

I'M SORRY TO *DISTURB* YOU, BUT STAN IS BACK, AND HE BROUGHT A *GUEST.*

EXCELLENT.

AMANDA, HOW ABOUT YOU PREVIEW MY LATEST *SERMON?*

REALLY?

OF COURSE. I WANT TO KNOW IF IT *SPEAKS* TO YOU. WE CAN DISCUSS IT LATER IN MY *ROOM* AFTER DINNER.

THAT WOULD BE *WONDERFUL.* THANK YOU.

NO, *KITTEN.* THANK YOU.

HELLO, STANLEY. YOU *NEVER* DISAPPOINT.

WHAT THE *HELL* IS GOING ON?!? WHAT DO YOU *WANT?* *WHO* ARE YOU?!?

SINCE YOU'LL BE ANSWERING *QUESTIONS* SOON ENOUGH, I SUPPOSE I CAN GO FIRST.

MY NAME IS LUCIEN. *LUCIEN SMYTHE.*

AS FOR WHAT I WANT-- WELL, THAT'S A BIT MORE *COMPLICATED.*

MY SOURCES TELL ME YOU DID COMPUTER PROGRAMMING FOR THE *DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE* A FEW YEARS AGO.

WEBSTER, PLEASE. *LYING* IS NOT ONE OF YOUR SKILLS.

NO.

MAYBE I DID SOME *FREELANCE* STUFF FOR THEM, BUT IT WAS ONLY BILLING PROGRAMMING. *ADMINISTRATIVE.*

NO, ACTUALLY, YOU DID SOMETHING FAR MORE VITAL FOR NATIONAL SECURITY. BUT THEN, I DON'T EXPECT YOU TO REMEMBER. THEY WIPED YOUR MIND WITH *HYPNOSIS* AFTER THE FACT.

HYPNOSIS?!? THAT'S *CRAZY!*

I TOLD YOU IT WAS *ADMINISTRATIVE.* I DON'T *KNOW* WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT.

I KNOW YOU *DON'T.*

BUT IT'S OKAY. THEY CAN *HELP* WITH THAT.

THEY CAN *REMEMBER* IT FOR YOU.

AHHHHH!!!

To Be Continued: MINDFIELD #3

SUBJECT: ERIKA
SCRIPT: J.T. KRUL
ARTWORK: LORI "CROSS" HANSON
COLORS: SIYA OUM

PROJECT COBALT

SHIELD

PROJECT COBALT DATA FILES

<LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA>>

ANGELES FAMILY CENTER

PLANNED PARENTHOOD

PORKY'S PIZZA

NEE'S Nails

IT'S GOING TO BE OKAY, S/S.

ABSTINANCE

I KNOW THIS IS A *HARD* TIME. YOUR MIND IS SWIRLING WITH *FEAR* AND *ANXIETY* AND MAYBE EVEN A BIT OF *EXCITEMENT*. AND EVEN THOUGH YOU CAME HERE TO *TERMINATE* THE PREGNANCY, YOU CAN STILL *CHANGE* YOUR MIND.

Compton, CA

YOU'VE GOT OTHER OPTIONS, SUCH AS *ADOPTION*.

KNOW YOUR CHOICES

IT'S A *BIG* DECISION. YOU WANT TO BE *SURE* THAT IT'S WHAT YOU *WANT*.

TASHA!

ANTHONY! WHAT THE *HELL* ARE YOU DOING HERE?

ME?!? WHAT ABOUT *YOU*?!? IT'S PARKER'S, ISN'T IT? I'LL BUST HIS *ASS!*

NO, YOU WON'T. THIS AIN'T GOT *NOTHING* TO DO WITH YOU.

I'M YOUR *BROTHER.* 'COURSE IT HAS TO DO WITH ME. AND LET ME TELL YOU-- THIS *AIN'T* HAPPENING.

GET OUTTA HERE, ANTHONY!

CHRIST. AND YOU HAD TO BRING *ERIKA?* LIKE SHE NEEDS TO SEE THIS.

OWWWW!

WE'RE *LEAVING.* NOW.

BACK OFF, ANTHONY.

DON'T GET IN THE WAY, *LIL'E.*

NOW GET LOST BEFORE I *BREAK* YOUR WRIST.

DON'T TRY AND--

I TOLD YOU BEFORE. *DON'T* CALL ME THAT.

OWWWW!

OKAY! *OKAY!*

AND KEEP YOUR MOUTH *SHUT.*

THANKS, ERIKA.

I WAS ALWAYS *BETTER* AT PUTTING ANTHONY IN HIS PLACE.

SORRY ABOUT THAT. WHERE WERE WE?

LOOK. MAYBE WE SHOULD *RESCHEDULE* UNTIL YOU FIGURE THINGS OUT.

NO. IT'S OKAY.

ERIKA, *YOU* SURE?

I'M SURE. I *NEED* TO DO THIS.

ASPEN

VOL. 1

#3

OF 6

COVER A

MINDFIELD

ASPEN

VOL. 1

MINDFIELD

#3

OF 6

COVER B

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IT'S OVER *HERE.*

THIS WAY.

SEE. TOLD YOU.

YOU KEEP *BROWSING* LIKE YOU'RE AT A BOOKSTORE AND ONE OF THESE DAYS YOU'LL *NEVER* FIND YOUR WAY *OUT.*

ME-- I STAY *FOCUSED* ON GETTING WHAT WE CAME FOR.

OKAY, LET'S MAKE THIS *QUICK.*

THLINK

AARRGG!

THLINK

OPEN *SESAME.*

JACKPOT.

SO... WHAT'S THE GOOD WORD, MALCOLM?

YOU KNOW THE SAYING, LUCIEN. A *MIND* IS A TERRIBLE THING TO *WASTE.*

PRESENT COMPANY *EXCLUDED.*

BUT HE DID OFFER US ONE USEFUL *NUGGET.*

AH, *EXCELLENT.* YOU NEVER DISAPPOINT.

I THINK WE ARE *DONE* WITH HIM, *STAN.*

PUT HIM WITH THE OTHERS OUT BACK.

YOU GOT IT.

AND *SOON*-- I DON'T WANT HIM *SOILING* HIMSELF IN MY *HOUSE.*

THE *SOLITARY KNIGHTS* ARE PROVING THEIR WORTH EACH AND EVERY DAY. OUR *GOAL* IS ALMOST IN *REACH.*

THERE IS BUT ONE *SECTION* OF CODE YET TO BE *RETRIEVED.*

I KNOW. WE TRIED TO TAKE THEM ALL WITHIN A SMALL WINDOW OF TIME, BUT ONE OF THE PROGRAMMERS HAS BEEN TRAVELING OVERSEAS--- TWO MORE DAYS. EVERYTHING IS SET.

YOU SEEM *AGITATED,* STAN.

NO... I JUST... THOSE TWO KIND OF GIVE ME THE *CREEPS.* AND NOT BECAUSE OF WHAT THEY CAN DO.

MALCOLM AND *IAN* HAVE BEEN A *GODSEND* THESE PAST FEW MONTHS. WITHOUT THEM, WE'D BE STALLED AT THE WISHFUL THINKING STAGE OF OUR *AGENDA.*

THE TIME IS ALMOST HERE. WE WILL USE THIS NATION'S *GREATEST* DISPLAY OF *MILITARY MIGHT* TO DESTROY ITS GREATEST SYMBOL OF *CAPITALISM.*

MALL OF AMERICA

THE MALL OF AMERICA INDEED.

THE FIRST *STRIKE* IN OUR *REVOLUTION* IS AT HAND.

DO *NOT* FAIL ME.

<40 YEARS AGO...>>

"THE BIGGEST *MISNOMER* IS THAT THE *JOURNEY* IS ABOUT *FOCUS*-- ABOUT FINDING ONE'S *SELF*.

"WHEN THE EXACT *OPPOSITE* IS *TRUE*. OUR SENSE OF SELF, OUR *IDENTITY*-- IT'S THE *DISTRACTION*.

"WE *CRIPPLE* OUR *MINDS* WITH THE *MEMORIES* OF PAST *SINS*, THE GLOW OF IMAGINED *PLEASURE*, AND THE NAGGING *ITCH* OF PREVIOUS *HUMILIATIONS*.

"THESE ARE THE *EMOTIONS*-- FEAR, HATRED, LUST-- THAT *ECLIPSE* THE VIEW OF THE *LIGHT*.

'THE DEPARTED SOUL IS DESCRIBED AS SHRINKING IN AGONY FROM THE PURE LIGHT OF THE *VOID*, AND EVEN FROM THE LESSER, TEMPERED LIGHTS, IN ORDER TO RUSH HEADLONG INTO THE COMFORTING DARKNESS OF SELFHOOD AS A REBORN HUMAN BEING, OR EVEN A BEAST, AN UNHAPPY GHOST, A DENIZEN OF HELL.'*

'ANYTHING RATHER THAN THE BURNING BRIGHTNESS OF UNMITIGATED REALITY-- ANYTHING!'"*

*FROM THE DOORS OF PERCEPTION, ALDOUS HUXLEY.

THE *VOID*, HUH? SOUNDS *PEACHY.*

I THOUGHT YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO MAKE ME FEEL *BETTER* ABOUT THESE *HEAD* GAMES.

I'M TRYING TO *EXPLAIN* THAT WHAT YOU ARE *EXPERIENCING* IS NOT SO AGAINST OUR *PSYCHIC MAKEUP.*

HUXLEY SAID THAT EVERYONE IS CAPABLE OF KNOWING *EVERYTHING* THAT *WAS* AND *IS* CURRENTLY HAPPENING THROUGHOUT THE *UNIVERSE*--

--A TRUE *COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS* PERHAPS.

IT'S OUR *BRAIN*, OUR PRAGMATIC, NERVOUS SYSTEM CONTROLLING BRAIN THAT CUTS US OFF FROM THAT *CONNECTION*-- *ISOLATING* ONLY TO THAT WHICH IS DEEMED *PRACTICAL* AND *USEFUL.*

DON'T START REFERRING TO MY *CONDITION* AS A *GIFT.*

I WON'T. BUT THE ABILITY YOU POSSESS, THE CONNECTIONS YOU CAN MAKE-- ONE COULD ARGUE THAT THEY MAKE YOU *MORE HUMAN* THAN *HUMAN.*

THEN BEING HUMAN IS ALL ABOUT *DEPRESSION, ANXIETY, FEAR,* AND *RAGE*-- BECAUSE THAT'S WHAT THESE CONNECTIONS ARE ALL ABOUT.

EXCEPT FOR THOSE WHO KNOW HOW TO *CLOSE* THEIR *MINDS* OFF-- LIKE ERIKA AND ISAAC AND MCMANUS...

...AND *YOU.*

WITH THE *PHARMAECOPIA* I'VE INGESTED OVER THE YEARS, I'M SURPRISED YOU DON'T MERELY SEE A *DAY-GLO* CLOUD OF *SMOKE* WHERE MY BRAIN SHOULD BE.

HE'S NOT PULLING HIS *WEIGHT*. WE GET OUT IN THE *FIELD*, AND HE GOES *WEAK* IN THE *GUT*. PROBABLY CRYING INTO A PILLOW WITH THAT SHRINK OF HIS RIGHT NOW INSTEAD OF TRAINING.

SHUT UP, *ISAAC*.

WHY YOU ALWAYS *STICKING* UP FOR HIM?

BECAUSE IT'S *HARDER* FOR HIM. CONNOR'S NOT *BUILT* LIKE *US*.

YOU GOT THAT *RIGHT*.

WAIT UNTIL SOMEONE PUTS A *BULLET* IN YOUR HEAD BECAUSE HE'S TOO *SCARED* TO ACT. THEN WE'LL SEE HOW *UNDERSTANDING* YOU ARE.

HEY, CONNOR. WHAT'S UP?

THEY BROUGHT THE KID INTO THE HOLDING *CELL*. *MCMANUS* WANTS US ALL IN ON THE *PROBE*.

WE GOT TWENTY MINUTES.

OH, AND ISAAC...?

EVEN IF I DID *CRY* INTO MY *PILLOW*, THAT'S NOTHING COMPARED TO WHAT I *DO* INTO *YOUR* PILLOW.

YOU *CAN'T* MAKE ME *TALK.*

SO, PISS OFF. I AIN'T GOING TO SAY *NOTHING... NADA...*

YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR **SOMETHING-- SEARCHING** FOR A PURPOSE OR A HIGHER CALLING. WE OFFER NONE OF THOSE THINGS. WE OFFER SIMPLY THE **TRUTH.**

THE **SOLITARY KNIGHTS** SEEK TO EXPOSE CIVILIZATION FOR WHAT IT IS-- AN OPPRESSIVE **LIE.**

TEAR YOURSELF FREE FROM THE **TRAPPINGS** AROUND YOU-- THE **STRUCTURES,** THE **SYSTEMS,** THE **SCHOOLS,** THE **SOCIETIES,** THE **LABELS,** THE **IDENTITIES.**

CAST AWAY FROM IT ALL-- AND HELP US **SHATTER** THE WORLD OF **DECEIT** THAT SURROUNDS US ALL. STOP BEING A **PRISONER.**

...ZILCH.

NAME'S *WEBSTER BLAKE.*

A MID-LEVEL *PROGRAMMER* WHO DID CONTRACT WORK FOR THE *D.O.D.**

HIS WAS ONE OF THE NAMES LIFTED FROM THE HACKER JOB. AND NOW, HE'S GONE *MISSING.*

WHAT *KIND* OF *WORK* DID HE DO FOR THE DEPARTMENT?

*DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE.

ON PAPER, IT WAS PURELY ADMINISTRATIVE.

TOOK SOME *CLEARANCE*, BUT I FOUND OUT HE WAS ONE OF THE PROGRAMMERS TASKED WITH REDESIGNING THE *PASS CODE PROTOCOL* FOR THE LATEST U.S. *NUCLEAR WARHEAD* STOCKPILE.

GREAT.

YOU'RE SAYING THIS GUY-- THE ONE KIDNAPPED--HE KNOWS THE CODES TO *DETONATE* A *WARHEAD?*

NOT EXACTLY.

"HE WAS HIRED TO COMPLETE CERTAIN *PORTIONS* OF THE OVERALL *PROGRAM*--

"--AS WELL AS CERTAIN PORTIONS OF THE *PASS* CODE PROTOCOL ITSELF.

"HE WAS ONE OF SEVERAL PROGRAMMERS BROUGHT INTO THE DOD TO HANDLE THIS SPECIFIC *TASK*. NONE OF THEM KNEW THE *NATURE* OF THE *PROGRAMMING* THEY CONDUCTED, AND THE WORK WAS *ISOLATED* TO SPECIFIC SECTIONS.

"IT *GUARANTEED* THAT NO *ONE* PROGRAMMER WOULD HAVE KNOWLEDGE OF ANY ONE *ENTIRE* CODE.

"APPARENTLY, THE D.O.D. EVEN WENT AS FAR AS TO *HYPNOTIZE* THE PROGRAMMERS. *WIPE* THEIR *MINDS* ABOUT THE ENTIRE TASK THEY PERFORMED.

"A LITTLE EXTRA *INSURANCE* POLICY."

HYPNOSIS?

AND HERE YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE THE ONLY HEADS WE WERE *MESSING* WITH.

IF THEY'VE BEEN *MIND-WIPED*, HOW COULD ANYONE *ACCESS* THE *INFORMATION*?

DON'T KNOW, AND DON'T WANT TO FIND OUT THE HARD WAY.

THERE WERE *TWELVE* PROGRAMMERS INVOLVED IN THE OPERATION, *ELEVEN* ARE MISSING.

WHERE'S THE LAST ONE?

<DENVER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT..>>

Baggage Claim

Baggage Claim

IT'S ALMOST *MIDNIGHT*, WHAT CAN'T POSSIBLY *WAIT* UNTIL TOMORROW?

MY *INBOX* HAS HIT *CRITICAL MASS*, JESS. THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU GO OFF THE GRID *TREKKING* THROUGH EUROPE. LIFE *PILES* UP ON YOU.

MARK, THE *GRIND* IS NOT LIFE. *LIFE* IS WHAT WE *WERE* DOING THE PAST TWO WEEKS.

YOU KNOW, YOU'RE *CUTE* WHEN YOU TRY TO BE PROFOUND.

AND YOU GET *COCKY* AFTER TWO WEEKS OF SOLID *SEX*.

MORE LIKE *NINE DAYS*.

Baggage Claim

I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE *COUNTING*.

JESS, I'M A *GUY*. I'M *ALWAYS* COUNTING.

THERE'S TEN TIMES THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE FROM OUR **SIMULATIONS**. IT'S GOING TO BE HARD TO **SIFT** THROUGH THEM ALL. WE'D BETTER STAY **CLOSE**.

NOT GETTING ANYTHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY. EWW... GROSS.

REMIND ME NOT TO USE A COMPLIMENTARY BLANKET THE NEXT TIME I FLY.

I'M PICKING UP SOMETHING... VERY FAINT.

WHAT IS IT, ERIKA? YOU GOT SOMETHING?

NO...

...I GOT NOTHING.

KASEEM. THEY'RE COMING OUT!

I'M ON IT.

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YOU NEED RIDE?

I TAKE YOU.

YEAH, THANKS.

WAY TO SELL IT, AHAB.

BITE ME, ISAAC.

DAMN. GOT SOMETHING.

WHERE?

KASEEM! LOOK OUT!

BRAT TAT TAT TAT

BAM BAM

AIIIEEEE!

DOWN!

REMEMBER, ISAAC. WE DON'T WANT TO KILL THEM ALL.

PICKY, PICKY.

BAMBAM BAMBAM

BLAM BLAM BLAM

MARK! THEY SHOT HIM!

I KNOW. I'M SORRY. BUT IT'S *YOU* THEY'RE AFTER.

ME?!?

TRUST ME. YOU DON'T KNOW.

THEY MADE *SURE* OF IT.

BAMBAM

BRAT TAT TAT TAT TAT

BLAM

7K430-111

ENOUGH OF THIS CRAP.

BAM BAM BAM

BRAT TAT TAT TAT

HOLD YOUR FIRE.

WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?

YOU'RE THE ONE WHO WANTED THEM ALIVE.

NOT AS EASY WHEN IT'S UP CLOSE AND *PERSONAL*, HUH?

AHHHHH!

MY TURN!

UNNH...

NO, DON'T!

BLAM
BLAM
BLAM

DAMMIT.

FREUD SAID IT BEST.

"HOMO HOMINI LUPUS.

"MEN ARE *NOT* GENTLE *CREATURES* WHO WANT TO BE *LOVED*, AND WHO AT THE MOST CAN *DEFEND* THEMSELVES IF THEY ARE *ATTACKED*.

"THEY ARE, ON THE CONTRARY, CREATURES AMONG WHOSE INSTINCTUAL ENDOWMENTS IS TO BE RECKONED A POWERFUL SHARE OF *AGGRESSIVENESS*.

"AS A RESULT, THEIR *NEIGHBOUR* IS FOR THEM NOT ONLY A POTENTIAL *HELPER* OR *SEXUAL OBJECT*, BUT ALSO SOMEONE WHO *TEMPTS* THEM TO *SATISFY* THEIR AGGRESSIVENESS ON HIM.

"TO *EXPLOIT* HIS CAPACITY FOR WORK WITHOUT *COMPENSATION*, TO *USE* HIM SEXUALLY WITHOUT HIS CONSENT, TO *SEIZE* HIS POSSESSIONS...

"...TO *HUMILIATE* HIM, TO CAUSE HIM *PAIN*, TO *TORTURE* AND *KILL* HIM.

"HOMO HOMINI LUPUS.

"MAN IS *WOLF* TO MAN."

IT'S LIKE WATCHING A *TRAIN WRECK* IN *SLOW MOTION.*

TWENTY MINUTES AGO, SHE HAD A *LIFE*. SHE HAD A *FUTURE*. NOW WHAT DOES SHE HAVE?

I'M SORRY.

WHY? WHY WERE THEY AFTER *ME?*

WHAT COULD THEY POSSIBLY WANT?

HAS TO DO WITH SOME *DEFENSE* WORK YOU DID AWHILE BACK.

THE *F.B.I.* CAN FILL YOU IN BETTER THAN I CAN.

WE... WE WERE GOING TO GET MARRIED.

UNNNNNN!!

JESSICA?!

WHAT HAPPENED?

IS SHE *DEAD*?

NO. SHE'S STILL BREATHING.

BUT SHE'S *CATATONIC*.

WELL, SOMETHING'S WRONG.

CONNOR, WAIT!

COME ON, GIRL, GIVE IT UP!

HEY! LEAVE HER ALONE!

RELAX, *CARNAC*. SHE'LL ALWAYS HAVE *PARIS*.

To Be Continued:
MINDFIELD #4

MINDFIELD

PROJECT COBALT DATA FILES

IN S.E.A.L. TRAINING, THEY TEACH US TO SHUT OUT EVERYTHING. THE PAIN, THE MISERY...

<AFGHANISTAN.>

...EVEN THE SOUNDS OF OUR FRIENDS DYING.

AFTER AWHILE, A HEAD SIMPLY CRACKS FROM THE BEATINGS.

SOUNDS LIKE YOU'RE SLAMMING A HAMMER INTO A PUMPKIN.

CLAR

IT'S HOLLOW-- EMPTY.

CLARK IS ALREADY DEAD BY THE TIME THEY SHOOT HIM. BUT THEY DON'T DO IT FOR HIM.

THEY DO IT FOR ME.

THE *TALIBAN* THINK WE'RE *WEAK*-- THAT WE AREN'T *MOTIVATED* IN THIS FIGHT-- THAT WE LACK *COMMITMENT.*

THEY THINK WE'RE LIKE THE *RUSSIANS.* THEY'RE *WRONG.*

AND IT'S NOT THE ONLY *MISTAKE* THEY MAKE.

LEAST I COULD DO IS *RETURN* THE *FAVOR.*

THEY TOOK THEIR TIME WITH MY *GUYS.* MADE THEM PAY *SLOWLY.*

THUK

THUK

THUK

THUK

NIGHTS LIKE TONIGHT HAVE A WAY OF DIGGING THEIR WAY INTO MY MEMORY.

I'LL EASILY PUT THE MILES AND THE MONTHS BETWEEN US, BUT EVERYTHING ELSE-- THAT'LL STICK RIGHT WITH ME.

FOREVER.

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COVER D

PROJECT COBALT

TURN ON

TUNE IN

DROP OUT

EA-1729

MINDFIELD

story & creator_
J.T. KRUL

illustrations_
ALEX KONAT

inks_
JON BOLERJACK

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BAD TRIP DOWN MEMORY LANE

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MOM SAYS SHE'S PROUD OF YOU.

ME, I THINK YOU CAN DO BETTER.

SARAH?

I WONDER HOW LONG THIS WILL LET ME RECORD ON YOUR VOICEMAIL. MAYBE I SHOULD JUST KEEP TALKING AND TALKING AND USE UP ALL THE SPACE.

WAIT...

DAD, STOP THE CAR. CAN YOU HEAR ME?!? GET OFF THE ROAD!

BUT REALLY, WHAT OTHER MESSAGES DO YOU NEED BESIDES MINE, RIGHT? I AM THAT AWESOME.

I MEAN, IT ONLY MAKES SENSE THAT YOU WOULD--

LOOKOUT!

C-C-CONNOR?

SARAH...?

I'M SCARED.

I KNOW, SIS. BUT I'M HERE. I'M RIGHT HERE WITH YOU.

NO... YOU'RE NOT. BUT YOU *COULD* BE.

ouldn't tell it at the time…

…but nightmares were good training for what my life would become.

Because running through other people's memories is a lot like being inside their nightmares.

You're scared. You don't know why, but you're scared anyway.

GETTING PRETTY CROWDED IN HERE.

WHAT'S THE MATTER? THOUGHT YOU WERE THE ONLY MEMBERS IN THE CLUB?

THAT'S IT THEN.

THAT'S HOW YOU'RE ABLE TO GET AT THE CODES BURIED IN THESE PROGRAMMERS' HEADS.

JUST A MATTER OF SCRAMBLING THE EGGS.

YOU KNOW ALL ABOUT THAT I BET-- FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE.

UHNNGH!

LET HER GO!

GUESS YOU'RE NOT USED TO PHYSICAL CONFRONTATION IN HERE.

YOU GOT ME THERE.

BUT NOTHING ABOUT THIS REALM IS PHYSICAL. RIGHT, IAN?

WHAT... IS... HE... DOING?

WH-WHAT'S HAPPENING?!?

COME ON, JESSICA. TRUST ME-- WE WANT TO GET AS FAR AWAY FROM THEM AS POSSIBLE.

HOW?

WE JUMP.

JUMP INTO THE RIVER?!? *THAT'S* YOUR PLAN?!?

YOU CAN RUN...

WE DON'T A HAVE A *CHOICE*. IT'S EITHER *JUMP* OR *FALL*.

THIS IS *INSANE!*

TELL ME ABOUT IT!

AIEEE!

...BUT YOU CAN'T HIDE.

My mind is nauseous. Like I'm riding a roller coaster blind and keep getting jerked around.

I normally try to ground myself to one location.

But with those two psychopaths after Jessica's mind…

…The only option is--

--Hopscotch.

GASP!

GASP!

YOU OKAY?

KOFF! NEVER... KOFF! BETTER.

HAD TO GET US OUT OF THERE FAST. WHERE ARE WE?

LOOKS LIKE... SWITZERLAND.

MARK?

THAT'S ME! *THAT'S US!*

WE SPENT A WEEK HERE, BEFORE RETURNING TO... TO...

...THEY SHOT HIM. MARK'S DEAD.

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?

I'LL EXPLAIN EVERYTHING, BUT WE GOTTA MOVE.

WHAT ABOUT MARK?

IT'S JUST A *MEMORY.*

JUST A MEMORY? THAT'S *ALL* I HAVE LEFT OF HIM NOW.

WAIT... STOP!

CAN'T. WE NEED TO KEEP MOVING.

WHO THE HELL ARE YOU? AND WHO ARE THOSE TWO CREEPS? WHAT'S GOING ON? AM I DREAMING? AM I DEAD?

YOU'RE NOT DREAMING. AND YOU'RE NOT DEAD. WE'RE IN YOUR MIND. ALL OF US. TOGETHER.

HOW IS THAT EVEN POSSIBLE?

TELEPATHY. THOSE TWO CREEPS HAVE BEEN TRACKING DOWN PROGRAMMERS LIKE YOU, LOOKING FOR HIDDEN INFORMATION. STUFF YOU DON'T EVEN KNOW YOU KNOW.

TELEPATHY. HIDDEN SECRETS. SOUNDS LIKE A TOTAL NIGHTMARE.

A VERY *REAL* NIGHTMARE.

IF THIS IS ALL HAPPENING IN MY MIND, THEN HOW DANGEROUS CAN IT REALLY BE?

THAT DEPENDS. WHAT'S YOUR OPINION ON LOBOTOMIES?

I LIKE MY BRAIN THE WAY IT IS. SO-- WHAT DO WE DO?

FIND A GOOD PLACE TO HIDE AND WAIT FOR THE CAVALRY.

YOU RECOGNIZE THIS PLACE?

I'M HOME.

IT'S THE BASEMENT IN THE HOUSE I GREW UP IN.

CAVALRY, HUH? DOES THAT MEAN YOU'RE ONE OF THE GOOD GUYS?

I TRY.

<DENVER INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT..>>
THIS DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE.
ONE MINUTE SHE'S FINE, AND THE NEXT SHE'S HAVING SOME KIND OF SEIZURE.
HER D.O.D. FILE DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING ABOUT ANY SUCH CONDITION.
WHAT'S *CONNOR'S* DEAL?
HE'S STILL BREATHING, BUT HIS HEART RATE IS SKY-HIGH.
THIS *CAN'T* BE A COINCIDENCE. SOMEONE'S DOING THIS--
--TO BOTH OF THEM.
FAN OUT. SEE WHAT YOU CAN FIND.
JUST WHAT EXACTLY ARE WE LOOKING FOR?
WE'LL KNOW IT WHEN WE SEE IT.
THIS CROWD IS TOO DENSE. WE'LL NEVER BE ABLE TO ISOLATE ANY SIGNALS.
NOT IF WE DON'T TRY.
SEE. WHAT'D I TELL YA? NOTHING BUT A JUMBLED MESS OF GAWKERS JONESING FOR A GLIMPSE OF SOME REAL TRAGEDY.
WAIT A SECOND. WHAT'S THAT?
ISAAC, CHECK OUT THE GUY IN THE HAT STANDING ALONE.
WHAT ABOUT HIM?
THAT'S JUST IT.
HE'S NOT ALONE.

SO.

SO.

YOU DO THIS KIND OF THING OFTEN? INVADE PEOPLE'S MINDS?

I CAN GO IF YOU WANT.

NO!

I DIDN'T MEAN IT LIKE THAT. I WAS JUST... I DON'T KNOW. NEVERMIND.

NO. I DON'T DO IT OFTEN. AT LEAST, I TRY NOT TO.

BELIEVE ME, AS DISTURBING AS THIS MIGHT SEEM FOR YOU, IT'S EVEN WORSE FOR ME. BUT-- IT COMES WITH THE JOB.

WHO EXACTLY DO YOU WORK FOR?

LET'S JUST SAY, I'M YOUR TAX DOLLARS HARD AT WORK.

TRYING TO FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT.

AND HOW'S *THAT* GOING?

I'LL LET YOU KNOW WHEN I FIND THE GOOD PART.

JESS! JESS!

WHAT'S GOING ON?

TH-THAT'S ME.

MY FATHER LIKED TO DRINK... MORE THAN HE LIKED TO DO ANYTHING ELSE. WHEN HE GOT REALLY BAD, I'D COME DOWN HERE TO STAY OUT OF HIS RANGE.

DID HE...?

GROSS! NO.

BUT HE DID LIKE TO SLAP THE CRAP OUT OF ME.

I SORT OF FILLED THAT ROLE ONCE MY MOM HAD ENOUGH AND TOOK OFF.

GET YER ASS UP HERE AND CLEAN THIS MESS!

HE'D NEVER COME DOWN. HE WAS A MEAN DRUNK, BUT LAZY AS ALL HELL.

IT WALKS DOWN STAIRS ALONE OR IN PAIRS...

THMP THMP THMP THMP

...EVERYONE KNOWS IT'S *SLINKY.*

DAMMIT!

DID IT FEEL GOOD, JESSICA? WATCHING HIM TAKE THAT FALL? HE WAS A SON-OF-A-BITCH, WASN'T HE?

SHUT UP.

AS YOU SEE, CONNOR-- I'VE BEEN DOING THIS FOR SOME TIME. I KNOW HOW TO GET AROUND.

SO DOES IAN.

OOOPHH!

WHOAH!

JUST LIKE A RODEO CLOWN, IAN!

WHOOPS.

WHAT'S YOUR *DEAL*, FREAKSHOW?

ISAAC, TAKE HIS BUDDY DOWN!

*HNNNNN

ARRGGH!

SICKO!
PERV!
CREEP!
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, ISAAC?
YOU GOT YOUR HANDS FREE. YOU COULD HAVE SAVED ME. WHY DIDN'T YOU?
LOOK AT JONES, MAN. THEY'RE GONNA KILL HIM ANY SECOND!
ISAAC?
ISAAC!!!

WHAT ARE THEY DOING?

GUYS! WHAT GIVES?

MY GOD!

RUN!

COME ON. LET'S GO!

IT'S A TERRORIST ATTACK!

SO? DID YOU GET IT?

LOOKS LIKE YOU LOST YOUR BUDDY.

SO IT SEEMS. TIME IS SHORT THEN. BETTER GET TO THE TASK AT HAND.

LEAVE ME ALONE!

NO. NOT YET.

WHAT'S THE MATTER? NOT GOING AS PLANNED?

NOT A PROBLEM. I DON'T NEED TO HAVE MY CAKE AND EAT IT TOO.

ONLY NEED A *SLICE.*

AHHHH!

NO!

YES... *YES.*

IT'S OKAY, JESSICA. IT'S GOING TO BE--

--HNNNNN...!

NO!

WHERE'S JESSICA?

EASY, CONNOR. RELAX. YOU'RE OKAY.

SEDATED.

THE POOR GIRL CAME OUT OF HER SEIZURE IN A TOTAL FRENZY. KEPT SCREAMING, CLUTCHING AT HER WRIST. THEY'VE GOT HER UNDER OBSERVATION.

THEY DID A REAL NUMBER ON HER.

ON *ALL* OF YOU, IT SEEMS.

ISAAC AND KASEEM WERE NEUTRALIZED OUT THERE. THEY TALKED ABOUT TWO GUYS IN THE CROWD. IT WAS WEIRD, THEY WERE LIKE--

--US. THEY WERE TELEPATHS LIKE US.

ABOUT TIME YOU WOKE UP. YOU GOT QUESTIONS TO ANSWER, CONNOR.

GIVE HIM A MINUTE.

WE DON'T HAVE A MINUTE. WE NEED TO KNOW WHAT INFORMATION THEY GOT-- IF ANY FROM THAT PROGRAMMER.

WE CAN DISCUSS THE NATURE OF YOUR ENCOUNTER LATER. RIGHT NOW-- SPILL IT.

YOU FIRST.

CONNOR! LET HIM GO!

TELL ME! TELL ME ABOUT THE OTHERS!

SHOW ME!

GET OUT OF MY HEAD!!!

1114

To Be Continued:
MINDFIELD #5

SUBJECT: KASEEM
SCRIPT: J.T. KRUL
ARTWORK: LORI "CROSS" HANSON
COLORS: SIYA OUM

PROJECT COBALT

SHIELD

PROJECT COBALT DATA FILES

DES MOINES, IOWA

I DIDN'T SIGN UP FOR THIS.

NINE MONTHS AGO, I WAS IN *IRAQ*, DOING MY THING AS A *SOLDIER* AND A *TRANSLATOR*.

BUT HERE I SIT-- "*TEMPORARILY*" REASSIGNED TO A *RECRUITMENT CENTER* IN THE MIDDLE OF *AMERICA*.

THE ONLY TRANSLATING I GET TO DO *HERE* IS BECAUSE *ADAMS* AND *CARTER* ARE DUMBER THAN CHEESE AND DON'T KNOW HOW TO WORK THE *COMPUTERS*.

ALL BECAUSE AN ADDITIONAL *BACKGROUND CHECK* FOUND A FEW OF MY FATHER'S "*ACQUAINTANCES*" TO BE "*QUESTIONABLE*."

TALK ABOUT THE DEFINITION OF *VAGUE*. NEVER GOT ANY *ANSWERS*-- SIMPLY NEW *ORDERS*.

I GUESS IT'S NOT SO MUCH THAT WE ALL *LOOK* ALIKE, BUT THAT WE ALL *THINK* ALIKE.

NO WAY! THE *HAWKEYES* ARE GONNA ROLL OVER *PENN STATE* THIS WEEKEND.

YOU'RE *CRAZY*. PENN STATE HAS *WON* THEIR LAST THREE GAMES. THEY'RE *UNSTOPPABLE*.

BUT SO IS *GIBSON*. BET HE *PASSES* FOR 200 YARDS--- *EASY*.

HEY, *KASEEM*. *SCHOOL'S* ALMOST OUT. YOU'D BETTER GET GOING WITH THE *BROCHURES*.

HOW ABOUT HITTING *VAN BUREN HIGH* TODAY?

U.S. ARMY

COME ON. YOU KNOW THE *REACTION* I GET AROUND HERE. IF I WASN'T STANDING NEXT TO AN *AMERICAN FLAG*, THEY'D START A *RIOT*.

THINK OF IT AS YOUR BIG CHANCE TO HELP CHANGE THE *PERCEPTION* ABOUT YOU *MUSLIMS*.

SHOW PEOPLE AROUND HERE YOU'RE NOT ALL A BUNCH OF *JIHADISTS*.

YEAH, I'M SURE THAT'S YOUR GOAL. *JACKASS*.

FRIGGIN' *TOWELHEAD*.

CHANGE PERCEPTIONS... GIVE ME A BREAK.

THESE MINDS ARE ABOUT AS CLOSED AS THEY CAN GET.

SINCE I'VE BEEN HERE, I'VE HAD MY TIRES SLASHED, SLURS SPRAY-PAINTED ON MY HOOD, AND ROCKS THROWN THROUGH MY WINDSHIELD.

COULD HAVE BEEN ANY ONE OF THESE LITTLE PRICKS.

THEN AGAIN, IT COULD HAVE BEEN MY SO-CALLED SUPERIOR OFFICERS. COUPLE OF BIG PRICKS.

NO MATTER WHAT I DO, THESE PEOPLE WILL ALWAYS SEE ME AS AN ENEMY.

I HATE IT HERE.

BUT... THIS *POST* ISN'T WITHOUT SOME *BRIGHT* SPOTS.

EARN MONEY FOR *COLLEGE.*

DISCOVER *STRENGTH* YOU NEVER KNEW YOU HAD.

SERVE YOUR COUNTRY.

GET THE *TRAINING* OF A LIFETIME.

RISE TO THE *CHALLENGE.*

VERY BRIGHT SPOTS.

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Through an array of psychological manipulation and various hallucinogenic drugs we developed the ability to read minds-- telepathy.

The procedure was cutting-edge. The risks-- unknown.

Well, apparently not as unknown as we were made to believe.

JANEK WAS AMONG OUR FIRST BREAKTHROUGHS FOR PROJECT COBALT, BUT HE SUFFERED A PSYCHIC BREAKDOWN-- COULDN'T CONTROL HIS ABILITY IN THE SLIGHTEST.

WE HAD TO *PROTECT* HIM-- */SOLATE* HIM FROM THE REST OF THE WORLD.

Seeing Janek lying there, all I could think was that I had to know--

--is he even aware of his situation? His reality?

Or lack thereof.

And what does this say about the rest of us?

Is this the same fate that awaits us all?

DAMMIT. ARE YOU *INSANE?!?*

HE HASN'T HAD ANY *CONTACT* IN OVER TWO YEARS AND YOU DECIDE TO *RATTLE* HIS MIND?!?

POOR *BASTARD.*

YOU GOT THAT RIGHT. THIS IS *MESSED* UP.

THIS IS YOUR *SOLUTION?* PUT HIM IN A *PRISON* AND FORGET ALL ABOUT HIM?

WE'RE WORKING TO REMEDY HIS SITUATION. NOBODY WANTS TO SEE JANEK LIKE THIS.

BUT THAT DIDN'T STOP YOU FROM GETTING A NEW BATCH OF *GUINEA PIGS* TO PLAY WITH.

RELAX, CONNOR. THIS ISN'T *HELPING* ANYTHING.

LISTEN TO HER. WE CAN TALK ABOUT THIS LATER. WE'VE GOT *BIGGER* PROBLEMS TO FOCUS ON.

WHAT IF I SAID I HAD *ENOUGH*? THAT WE'VE ALL HAD ENOUGH?

WHAT ARE YOU GONNA DO, SUSPEND US? *FIRE* US?

YOU CAN'T SIMPLY WALK AWAY FROM THIS *PROGRAM*-- BECAUSE, QUITE FRANKLY, YOU NEED US *MORE* THAN WE NEED YOU.

HOW DO YOU FIGURE?

YOU KNOW THOSE SPECIAL *PILLS* YOU TAKE-- YOUR *COBALT BLUES*? THEY DON'T KEEP YOUR ABILITIES GOING. THEY KEEP THEM IN CHECK-- KEEP THEM FROM GOING TOO FAR.

IN OTHER WORDS, THOSE PILLS ARE THE ONLY THINGS KEEPING YOU FROM ENDING UP...

...*EXACTLY* LIKE JANEK.

DUDE...

DAMN!

YOU SON-OF-A-BITCH!

CONNOR!

Mcmanus knows death. He's seen it time and time again.

S RICHARD · CARTER EVANS · CASEY
WE SEMPLE · MALCOLM J GRIM · FRANK
· CAREY A FOSNAUGH · FRANK T
MARKS BUNDY · WILLIAM A GRIFFIS III · C
CHASE LITTLEPAGE · RANDALL E PERRY · RO
· ROY C BLASSEY · ALAN L BRACKEN ·
AR CRUZ GONZALES · RONALD D HECK · J
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CTOR P SAN NICOLAS · CARL J PREUSS · GE
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JOHN J KOS · THOMAS A MARR
APRY S RUTHERFORD · THOMAS R

Only makes sense that he'd be willing to make sacrifices in order to save lives.

But damn him-- we couldn't make that choice.

Because you can only make a sacrifice…

…when you know what's at stake.

CAN'T BELIEVE YOU *DECKED* HIM LIKE THAT.

I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU DIDN'T.

YOU REALLY SO SURPRISED THEY KEPT US IN THE *DARK* ABOUT THIS?

I KNEW THEY WEREN'T TELLING US EVERYTHING, BUT I DIDN'T THINK THEY'D OUTRIGHT *SCREW* US.

BOY, YOU'VE OBVIOUSLY NEVER BEEN IN THE SERVICE. SCREWING YOU IS WHAT THEY DO-- *EVERY* CHANCE.

RIGHT, KASEEM?

PRETTY MUCH.

WE'RE NOT PARTNERS IN THIS WAR. WE'RE *SOLDIERS*. TOTALLY *DISPOSABLE*. THEY'LL CHEW US UP, SPIT US OUT, AND MOVE ON TO THE NEXT BATCH.

DAMN STRAIGHT.

IF YOU BELIEVE THAT, THEN WHY IN THE HELL DID YOU SIGN UP FOR THIS PROGRAM?

ARMED SERVICES WERE DONE WITH ME. I NEEDED TO FIND A NEW HOME-- A NEW *FIGHT*.

WHY NOT DO SOMETHING *ELSE*?

BECAUSE FIGHTING IS *ALL* I KNOW HOW TO DO.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

IT WAS THE ONLY WAY I COULD ACTUALLY DO SOMETHING. AFTER 9/11 MY SKIN TONE MADE ME *UNDESIRABLE* FOR MOST EVERYTHING.

AM I THE ONLY ONE WHO'S *PISSED* ABOUT THIS?

DON'T BE SO *DRAMATIC*. IT SUCKS. BUT NOT MUCH WE CAN DO ABOUT IT. BESIDES, IT *DOESN'T* CHANGE ANYTHING.

DOESN'T CHANGE ANYTHING?!?

IT CHANGES *EVERYTHING!*

WE KNEW GOING IN-- THIS PROGRAM WAS GOING TO BE... *MURKY* AT BEST. IT'S THE DEFINITION OF *TOP-SECRET.*

WE STILL GOT A *JOB* TO DO AND THE *MEANS* TO DO IT.

KASEEM, DO YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT THE HELL SHE IS TALKING ABOUT?

I DO. AT THE END OF THE DAY, IT'S STILL ABOUT STOPPING THE *BAD* GUYS.

YEAH? WELL-- THANKS TO MCMANUS AND HIS PROGRAM-- *ALL I* SEE IS THE *BAD.* IN *EVERYONE.*

LET ME GUESS. MCMANUS TELL YOU MY HEAD NEEDED MORE WORK?

HE TOLD ME YOU HAD ANOTHER *ROUGH* DAY IN THE FIELD. SAID YOU DEALT WITH SOME REALLY NASTY FELLAS.

HE TOLD YOU THAT? DIDN'T THINK YOU HAD THE *CLEARANCE.*

WELL... HE MAY HAVE LET SOMETHING *SLIP.* ONLY SO THAT I COULD HELP.

FORGET ABOUT ME. IF YOU WANT TO HELP ANYONE, HELP *JESSICA.*

WHO IS SHE?

COLLATERAL DAMAGE. SUFFERED MAJOR *TRAUMA,* BEGINNING WITH WATCHING HER BOYFRIEND GET GUNNED DOWN RIGHT IN FRONT OF HER.

THEY'VE GOT HER *SEDATED*.

WORRIED THAT IF SHE REGAINS CONSCIOUSNESS SHE MIGHT PANIC HERSELF RIGHT INTO A *HEART ATTACK*.

SHE'S BEEN THROUGH ENOUGH CRAP IN HER LIFE. SHE DIDN'T *DESERVE* THIS.

SOUNDS LIKE YOU TWO GO *WAY* BACK.

JUST MET HER, ACTUALLY. I GUESS YOU COULD SAY I *UNDERSTAND* HER, THOUGH.

THE PAIN OF LOSING THE PEOPLE YOU *LOVE*. THE EMPTINESS IS DEAFENING. YOUR WHOLE WORLD COMES TO AN *END*. AND NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO, YOU KEEP SEEING THEM DIE RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU.

QUITE THE CONNECTION YOU GOT THERE, CONNOR.

YEAH, BUT THE THING ABOUT ME AND CONNECTIONS? NOT A GOOD MATCH.

YOU OKAY?

NO. NO, I'M NOT.

AND I *NEVER* WILL BE.

LOOK-- I KNOW WE'VE OBVIOUSLY GOT SOME *UNRESOLVED* ISSUES TO DISCUSS.

I'M NOT A TOTAL *PRICK*. I WANT TO ADDRESS YOUR PROBLEMS. I WANT THIS PROGRAM TO WORK. IT *NEEDS* TO WORK. FOR THE *SAFETY* OF THIS COUNTRY.

LIKE RIGHT NOW...

...BECAUSE THIS *THREAT* IS VERY, VERY REAL.

IN YOUR MIND-SWEEP OF THE SUSPECT IN CUSTODY, YOU UNCOVERED SEVERAL REFERENCES TO SOMETHING CALLED THE *SOLITARY KNIGHTS* AND THE NAME *LUCIEN*. WE FOUND A CATALOGUE OF PODCASTS ONLINE.

LUCIAN...

LOOKED LIKE YOUR RANDOM NEW AGE *MUMBO-JUMBO*.

BUT THIS GROUP HAS ACQUIRED THE *OVERRIDE* CODES FOR THE NUCLEAR MISSILE DEFENSE GRID.

WHAT'S THE BIG PROBLEM? NO WAY SOMEONE IS GOING TO BREAK INTO A SILO AND LAUNCH A ROGUE *MISSILE*. SIMPLY HAVE SECURITY STEPPED UP ON ALL WARHEAD STOCKPILES.

RIGHT. AND AS FOR THE LEAKED CODES, UPDATE THE SYSTEM AND CHANGE THE CODES. IT WILL RENDER THEIR INTEL *USELESS*.

THAT'S BEING DONE, BUT IT'S TOO LATE.

THEY'VE ALREADY GOT A *WARHEAD*.

THREE WEEKS AGO, A ***WARHEAD*** WAS STOLEN FROM A MILITARY INSTALLATION IN NEVADA.

THE W-92 ***THERMONUCLEAR*** WARHEAD HAS A YIELD OF 900 KILOTONS, AND A BLAST RADIUS OF ALMOST HALF-A- MILE.

W-92

JESUS.

HOW THE HELL DID THEY ***MANAGE*** TO STEAL A FRIGGIN' WARHEAD?

THEY'RE THOSE SONS-OF-BITCHES FROM THE AIRPORT--- THE ***OTHER*** TELEPATHS.

EXPLAINS HOW THEY COULD ***STRUT*** OFF THE BASE WITH ONE.

THEY ***DUMPED*** THE TRUCK TWENTY MILES OUT AND DISAPPEARED.

NO. I SWEAR I'VE NEVER SEEN THEM BEFORE. WE DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THEM.

WHO ARE THOSE GUYS? MORE OF YOUR FAILED TEST CASES?

BUT MAYBE WE CAN FIND OUT.

KASEEM, WHERE'S YOUR ***JACKET?***

NORMALLY, DYLAN'S REMOTE VIEWING WORKS BETTER WITH AN ITEM THE SUBJECT OWNED AND CARRIED. HE ONLY *GRABBED* YOUR JACKET KASEEM, BUT IT MIGHT BE ENOUGH.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN *IMPOSSIBLE* FOR ME TO REACH THIS POINT IF I HADN'T REALIZED THE TRUTH.

PEOPLE DON'T WANT *ANSWERS*. THEY WANT *EXCUSES*. THEY WANT TO BELIEVE THAT THERE AREN'T ANY ANSWERS. NO *SOLUTIONS*.

CALL IT *PESSIMISM*. CALL IT *NIHILISM*.

I CALL IT THE *NEW AMERICAN DREAM*. CARTE BLANCHE TO DO WHAT YOU WILL...

BECAUSE... F*** IT.

WHAT'S THE POINT, RIGHT?

AHHHHH!

THUD

DYLAN!

WHAT WAS THAT?

NEVER *EXPERIENCED* ANYTHING LIKE IT BEFORE.

IT WAS LIKE HE... HE *SENSED* ME. SAW ME WATCHING OVER THEM AND DIDN'T LIKE IT. SO HE *PUSHED* ME AWAY.

WHO, DYLAN?

HIM.

After making such a connection, getting the coordinates was easy for Dylan.

It was the most rudimentary exercise for remote viewers.

It put the target somewhere in rural Nebraska. Mcmanus had us on a plane in thirty minutes.

But this time, we brought some help. The real professionals.

Not that I didn't want the help. But a dozen fresh minds-- stuck in an enclosed place. It was a struggle to block them out.

But I did my best.

HEY...

...YOU'RE *ISAAC*, RIGHT?

JONES TRIED TO *WARN* US. HE SAID YOU'D LET US HANG OUT TO *DIE*. JUST LIKE YOU DID TO HIM AND THE REST OF YOUR TEAM IN *AFGHANISTAN*.

WHAT'S YOUR *DAMAGE*? YOU SCARED OR JUST STUPID?

WHAT?

I DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING.

THAT'S RIGHT. KEEP IT THAT WAY.

ALL OF YOU.

PPFFT

PPFFT

The soldiers have been trained to detect and confront the enemies as they come across them. It's their way.

We got our own way. Find the holes-- the place without any mental signatures. That way, we know our coast is clear.

MY GOD...

WHAT'S WRONG?

IT'S THE OTHER PROGRAMMERS.

WHAT THE HELL IS THIS? SOME KIND OF *MASS GRAVE*?

LOOK CLOSER, ISAAC. THEY'RE *NOT* DEAD.

MIGHT AS WELL BE. I'M SENSING ZERO *BRAIN ACTIVITY.*

IF WE HADN'T GOTTEN TO HER, *JESSICA* WOULD BE LYING IN THIS *DITCH* RIGHT NOW.

BASTARDS.

Leading with strength isn't my thing. I'm not the gung-ho type. That's normally Isaac's bag.

But what can I say-- I'm pissed.

BLAM

BLAM BLAM

BRAT TAT TAT TAT

BA- BOOM

BAM BAM BAM

BRAKA BRAKA BRAKA

BA- BOOM

THIS HOUSE IS CRAWLING WITH PEOPLE. IT'S TOTAL CHAOS INSIDE.

BRAT TAT TAT TAT

BRAT TAT TAT TAT

ONE SEEMS TO BE HOLDING STEADY IN A BACK ROOM.

BET THAT'S THE RINGLEADER.

WE'LL CHECK HIM OUT.

ISAAC-- GET KASEEM INTO THE BARN SO HE CAN DISARM THE WARHEAD.

THIS ROOM LOOKS CLEAR.

REMEMBER, THOSE TWO *NIGHTMARES* FROM THE AIRPORT DON'T *REGISTER* TELEPATHICALLY.

THEY COULD BE IN THERE.

HERE, LET ME *HELP* YOU.

THAT'S OKAY, CONNOR. I'M *OLD-FASHIONED.*

OLD-FASHIONED. LADIES FIRST. I GET IT.

YOU *COMING* OR NOT?

THIS IS IT.

A FEW MORE HOURS AND THIS WOULD HAVE ALL BEGUN. A *NEW CHAPTER* IN AMERICAN HISTORY.

I'M NOT ABOUT TO JUST WALK AWAY IN *FAILURE*. THIS NATION MUST BE SHOWN THE INEVITABLE CONCLUSION TO THEIR *EMPIRE*.

LIKE ALL THE OTHERS, IT TOO MUST *FALL*.

THIS IS NOT EXACTLY THE *END* I WAS LOOKING FOR, BUT IT WILL HAVE TO DO. I CANNOT LET THEM STOP US. NO MATTER THE *SACRIFICE*.

F*** IT. RIGHT?

BAM

TING

BLAM

KRAK

WE GOT *PROBLEMS.* IT'S EMPTY.

EMPTY?

WHERE IS IT?

WHERE'S WHAT?!?

BLAM

ARRGGH!

WHERE'S THE WARHEAD?!?

FEELS LIKE IT'S TAKING *FOREVER*. HOW *FAST* ARE YOU DRIVING?

I'M SORRY. WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO *SPEED* WHILE CARRYING A NUCLEAR *WARHEAD?*

GUESS *NOT.*

MALL OF AMERICA®

200 Mi.

United We Stand.

DON'T WORRY.

WE'LL BE THERE *SOON* ENOUGH.

EBU 941

To Be Concluded:
MINDFIELD #6

MINDFIELD

PROJECT COBALT DATA FILES

PROJECT COBALT

SUBJECT: McMANUS
SCRIPT: J.T. KRUL
ARTWORK: LORI "CROSS" HANSON
COLORS: SIYA OUM

WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

ME? WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

YOUR WIFE'S PRETTY HOT.

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

BET SHE'S NASTY IN BED. YOU CAN TOTALLY TELL. SHE'S GOT WHORE'S EYES.

YOU'RE A COWARD. CRIED YOURSELF TO SLEEP THE NIGHT BEFORE YOU WENT OUT ON YOUR FIRST TOUR. PUSSY.

SCREW YOU!

AT LEAST I DIDN'T BEAT OFF WHILE PEEPING ON MY SISTER. YOU SICKO.

BESIDES, YOU KNOW SHE'S CHEATING ON YOU.

YOU SON-OF-A-BITCH--

LOOK AT THEM...

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

NOT SURE. POSSIBLE THAT IF THEIR MINDS ARE EXPERIENCING MOMENTS OF TRUE TELEPATHIC SYNAPSES, THEY ARE MAKING CONTACT WITH EACH OTHER.

HURRY WITH THE SEDATIVES.

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

DAMN.

BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP BEEP

GREAT. JUST GREAT.

DR. QUIMBY FINISHED THE AUTOPSIES LATE LAST NIGHT. THE OFFICIAL CAUSE OF DEATH IN ALL FOUR SUBJECTS WERE THE SAME-- MASSIVE BRAIN ANEURYSMS.

FROM THE TIME THE SEIZURES BEGAN, IT WAS ONLY A MATTER OF MINUTES. THE STRESS WAS TOO GREAT.

DAMMIT!

THREE MONTHS, I WASTED ON THESE TEST SUBJECTS!

WE FOCUSED ALL OUR ENERGY ON THEM-- AND NOW THEY'RE GONE.

WE'LL HAVE TO KEEP TRYING. DID YOU CONTACT THE NEXT NAME ON THE LIST?

I DID, BUT PERHAPS YOU SHOULD GIVE YOURSELF A FEW DAYS.

MR. MCMANUS, THE DOCTORS STATED IN THEIR INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF PROJECT COBALT THAT WE WERE LOOKING AT A LESS THAN FOUR PERCENT CHANCE OF SUCCESS.

SCREW THE STATISTICS. THEY'RE STILL CLEARING RUBBLE AWAY FROM GROUND ZERO IN NEW YORK.

THE ENTIRE WORLD IS IN A STATE OF HIGH ALERT. I'LL BE DAMNED IF WE'RE GONNA BE CAUGHT OFF GUARD AGAIN THE NEXT TIME AL QAEDA SURFACES INSIDE OUR BORDERS.

WE'RE AT WAR, BRANDON. AND TIME IS ONE OF THE ENEMIES. I WANT TO SEE HIM-- TODAY.

YOU'VE CLEARLY GOT AN IMPECCABLE RECORD, CAPTAIN. CAN I ASK WHY YOU WOULD CONSIDER LEAVING WHAT APPEARS TO BE A BRIGHT FUTURE IN THE ARMED FORCES TO JOIN US?

YOU SAID THIS PROJECT WAS ABOUT REALLY GETTING TO THE CORE OF THE WAR ON TERROR.

I'VE ALREADY SERVED ONE TOUR IN IRAQ. IT'S DEFINITELY A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE, BUT WE BOTH KNOW THE REAL BATTLEFIELD IS GLOBAL. THE THREATS ARE EVERYWHERE.

xT.J.K

SOUNDS GOOD TO ME, SIR.

GLAD TO HEAR IT. WE'LL START IMMEDIATELY.

WELCOME ABOARD, JANEK.

IT'S DEFINITELY ON THE EXPERIMENTAL END OF THE SPECTRUM IN TERMS OF WHAT WE DO HERE AT THE CIA, BUT IF EVERYTHING GOES AS PLANNED, YOU'LL HAVE THE VERY BEST TOOLS TO STOP POTENTIAL THREATS AT THEIR INCEPTION.

IT WILL BE THE DEFINITION OF A GAME CHANGER.

ASPEN

VOL. 1

#6

OF 6

COVER A

MINDFIELD

ASPEN

VOL. 1

#6

OF 6

COVER B

MINDFIELD

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MINDFIELD CREATED BY J.T. KRUL

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<NEBRASKA.>>

What we have here is the definition of the word standoff.

This compound belongs to a man named Lucien Smythe. A wannabe guru, who really seems to be after something bigger--

--Revolution.

Him and his followers stole a nuclear warhead. We came to stop them, but might be too late.

While the gunplay wages on outside…

…We're inside-- looking to stop this threat at the source.

Like I said though--

--we may be too late.

It's a standoff, alright.

Of the minds.

WHAT IS THIS?

SOME *PROPULSION LAB.* THOSE ARE JET ENGINES.

I KNOW THAT. I MEANT-- *WHERE* ARE WE?

HEY! YOU!

IT'S A *MEMORY.* LUCIEN'S MEMORY.

YEAH, YOU-- WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING IN *HERE?* THIS IS A *RESTRICTED* AREA.

I... I WAS JUST GONNA--

IT'S OKAY, HAROLD! THIS IS *MY* BOY-- *LUCIEN.*

OH--

DIDN'T KNOW, *BARRY.*

HE WAS WANDERING BY HIMSELF.

SORRY-- HE WAS COMING TO SEE ME. MUST HAVE GOTTEN *LOST.*

NOT *HARD* TO DO IN THIS PLACE.

WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO PULL?

YOU *DISAPPEAR*-- TURN YOUR MOTHER INTO A BASKET CASE. YOU DON'T CALL. FOR MONTHS, WE WONDER IF YOU'RE EVEN STILL ALIVE.

AND NOW, YOU SHOW UP HERE-- AT MY *WORK.*

CARBON-9 SECURITY

WHAT THE HELL IS THE MATTER WITH YOU?!? IS IT *DRUGS?*

LET ME *GO!*

HE NEVER *UNDERSTOOD* ME.

LUCIEN? WH-WHAT IS THIS?

MY FATHER COULDN'T SEE HOW HE WAS PART OF THE *PROBLEM.*

I ADMIT TRYING TO BLOW UP THE ENGINEERING PLANT WAS RATHER *AMBITIOUS* AT THE TIME. THE *EXPLOSIVES* WEREN'T EVEN THAT POWERFUL.

BUT I GOT *POWER* NOW-- POWER TO MAKE EVERYTHING GO *BOOM.* BUT THEN, YOU *KNOW* THAT ALREADY, DON'T YOU?

SO-- WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

WE GO GET HIM. BUT BE *CAREFUL.*

THINGS IN HERE HAVE A HABIT OF GETTING... *SCREWY.*

HANG ON!

ASHES, ASHES. THEY ALL FALL--

--DOWN.

ERIKA! LOOK OUT!

THAT BLUBBERING KID PUT US ON THE PATH, BUT DIDN'T HAVE MUCH IN THE WAY OF SPECIFICS ABOUT THE LOCATION OF THE *WARHEAD*.

A WHITE VAN HEADED TO THE *MALL OF AMERICA*.

HE WASN'T BLUBBERING. HE WAS IN *SHOCK*. YOU BLEW HIS KNEE OFF.

YEAH-- WORKED PRETTY *GOOD*, DIDN'T IT?

AT LEAST WE GOT EXTRA *HELP* THIS TIME. AN EYE IN THE SKY, COURTESY OF *HOMELAND SECURITY*.

SATELLITE IMAGERY HAS PICKED UP A WHITE VAN, DUE NORTH 40 MILES OF YOUR CURRENT POSITION.

THERMAL ANALYSIS INDICATES POSSIBLE NUCLEAR SIGNATURE.

PROCEED WITH CAUTION.

HEAR THAT? HE'S TALKING TO *YOU*.

WHATEVER.

THE LAST TIME WE WERE IN A SITUATION LIKE THIS, YOU SIMPLY OPENED FIRE. REMEMBER?

DON'T WORRY. I GOT THIS *COVERED*.

♫ "BUT THE TIME IS RIPE FOR CHANGES. THERE'S A GROWING FEELING-- THAT TAKING A CHANCE ON A NEW KIND OF VISION IS DUE.

"I USED TO TRUST THE MEDIA-- TO TELL ME THE TRUTH, TELL US THE TRUTH. BUT NOW I'VE SEEN THE PAYOFFS-- EVERYWHERE I LOOK. ♫

♫ "WHO DO YOU TRUST WHEN EVERYONE'S A CROOK?" ♫

♫ "REVOLUTION CALLING. REVOLUTION CALLING. REVOLUTION CALLING YOU!" ♫

TURN THAT OFF.

COME ON, MAN. NEED SOMETHING TO *PSYCHE* MYSELF UP. I MEAN-- WE GOT A *WARHEAD* BACK THERE. A FRIGGIN' *NUCLEAR* WARHEAD.

FOCUS, BENNY. YOU NEED TO REMEMBER THAT--

U.S. ARMY
209725

PPPTPPPPTPPPPTPPP

WHAT THE *HELL* IS THAT? YOU HEAR THAT?

SOUNDS LIKE A *'COPTER*, BUT WHERE'S IT COMING FROM?

BEHIND US!

AHHHHH!

MORNING, FELLAS!

WE ALL KNOW YOU GOT SOME SENSITIVE *CARGO* BACK THERE, SO BE *COOL*. THE ROAD TRIP IS *OVER*.

HOW'S IT *LOOKING*, KASEEM?

NOT GOOD.

I THOUGHT YOU WERE A *PRO* WITH THIS KIND OF STUFF.

I AM. WHICH MEANS I KNOW WHAT I *CAN* DO, WHAT I *CAN'T* DO...

...AND WHAT I *SHOULDN'T* DO. THE WARHEAD IS *LIVE*-- AND THE SYSTEM'S BEEN CLONED TO A REMOTE PROGRAM CONTROL. MOST LIKELY A *LAPTOP*.

ANY TAMPERING COULD *DETONATE* THE WARHEAD. MY HANDS ARE TIED.

BUT WHOEVER'S ON THE OTHER END--

ALL THEY NEED TO DO IS PUSH A *BUTTON,* AND THIS THING BLOWS.

LET'S SEE HOW YOU LIKE IT. IT MAY ONLY BE IN YOUR *MIND*---

---BUT IT *HURTS* A HELL OF A LOT *WORSE.*

Can't stop him.

He's too strong.

Gotta find an angle. Do something unexpected.

If Malcolm is focusing his energy here, maybe he's vulnerable--

--at home.

Not exactly what I pictured inside the mind of a raging psychopath.

HURRY UP, MALCOLM. YOU RUN LIKE A *GIRL.*

SHUT UP, *IAN.*

WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?

PROBABLY EXACTLY WHAT YOU THINK, *CHLOE.*

HEY, *MALCOLM.*

DO I KNOW YOU?

SORT OF. YOU *WILL.*

HUH? I *DON'T* UNDERSTAND.

I KNOW.

SORRY, *KID.*

ARRGH!

One psycho down.
One to go.

GET AWAY FROM HER!

WHUMP

ERIKA? YOU OKAY?

YEAH, I'M FINE. THANKS.

WHERE DID THEY GO?

I THINK WE'RE *ALONE* NOW IN HERE.

I DON'T KNOW.

DID YOU *KILL* THEM?

WHAT ABOUT *LUCIEN?*

WE'RE RUNNING *OUT* OF TIME!

I *KNOW.*

YOU CAN'T *SAVE* THIS WORLD! YOU CAN'T STOP THE *FUTURE!*

THIS *CIVILIZATION* IS BANKRUPT-- MORALLY, EMOTIONALLY, FINANCIALLY.

THE ONLY WAY TO SAVE IT IS TO *DESTROY* IT AND REBUILD FROM *SCRATCH.*

You go, dude. Keep talking.

Erika's right. We're running out of time. Gotta stop this guy from pushing his button-- from detonating.

I know what I can do. But don't know if I can handle it.

Then again-- like everything else about this ability…

…I never really had a choice, did I?

Just like he never had a chance.

NOOO!

Once I got inside his head…

HRRGHH!

…it was all over.

SEQUENCE CANCELLED

CONNOR...

...ARE YOU OKAY?

I'M STILL HERE--

--which is more than I can say for him.

EXCELLENT WORK, YOU TWO. ISAAC AND KASEEM HAVE REACQUIRED THE *WARHEAD*.

AMBULANCE

AMBU

WE GOT YOU, YOU SON-OF-A-BITCH! THIS COUNTRY IS MORE RESILIENT THAN A BUNCH OF *WHACK JOBS*.

HE *CAN'T* HEAR YOU.

WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM?

WHAT DO YOU THINK HAPPENED? I DID WHAT YOU *TRAINED* ME TO DO.

YO, CONNOR. WHERE YOU GOING?

ATF

MAN, THAT GUY IS *MESSED* UP.

HEY. WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

CATCHING UP ON SOME WORK. *SCHEMATIC BREAKDOWNS* FOR MCMANUS.

<WASHINGTON D.C.>>

KEEP ON *KEEPING* ON.

MIGHT AS WELL.

HAVE YOU SEEN *CONNOR?* I THOUGHT HE WAS IN HIS ROOM, BUT IT'S *EMPTY.* ISAAC'S GONE TOO.

YOU THINK THEY COULD BE *TOGETHER?*

I SOMEHOW *DOUBT* THAT.

GOD KNOWS WHAT ISAAC IS UP TO, BUT CONNOR IS PROBABLY WANDERING ABOUT. YOU KNOW HOW HE GETS.

YEAH, I *DO.*

Groople

KMan600: Just finished big work project.
KMan600: What R u doin?
Alice4ev: Book report. Scarlett Letter. God, I hate English.
KMan600: What year r u?
Alice4ev: Junior.
KMan600: kewl. Did you like the book?
Alice4ev: dk. Didn't read it. Saw the movie. It sucked.
KMan600: I could help you. I remember the book.
Alice4ev: u r sweet. :)
KMan600: so r u. :)

THANKS FOR FINALLY ANSWERING MY *TEXT.*

NO PROBLEM, BUT I HAVE TO TELL YOU-- I'M STARTING TO THINK THE WHOLE TOUGH *BITCH* VIBE IS ALL AN ACT.

MAYBE I'M WORRIED YOU'LL *KILL* ANOTHER CIVILIAN AND I'LL HAVE TO *DISPOSE* OF THE BODY.

TOUCHÉ.

OKAY, I'LL ADMIT IT. I'M *WORRIED* ABOUT YOU. NOBODY ELSE HAS BEEN THROUGH WHAT YOU HAVE. I CAN'T IMAGINE WHAT IT MUST BE LIKE.

IF I WERE YOU, I WOULDN'T *TRY.*

I'M *BREAKING* DOWN INSIDE, BIT BY BIT. IT MIGHT NOT HAPPEN TODAY, BUT SOMEDAY MY HEAD IS GOING TO *SPLIT* COMPLETELY. I CAN FEEL IT.

WHY NOT?

EVERY MINUTE OF EVERY DAY IS A *STRUGGLE*-- A STRUGGLE TO BLOCK OUT ALL THAT'S *GROSS* AND *VILE* AND *EVIL* IN THIS WORLD.

THE SAD TRUTH IS THAT WE ALL HAVE THAT *BILE* INSIDE. WE ALL HAVE THE ABILITY TO DO GREAT EVIL IN THIS WORLD. IT'S A PART OF *HUMAN NATURE.*

IF I GAVE UP, THAT WOULD BE SAYING THAT THE BILE WAS WHAT WE REALLY ARE AT OUR *CORE.* THAT *HUMANITY* IN GENERAL IS... WELL-- *EVIL.* AND I JUST DON'T BELIEVE THAT. NOT *YET* ANYWAY.

QUITE THE *SERMON,* CONNOR.

TO BE *HONEST,* I WASN'T THAT WORRIED.

I'M NOT BUYING THAT WHOLE *WOUNDED* DUCK VIBE YOU GOT GOING.

You probably thought I decided to end it all.

Well-- I thought about it. A lot.

So why not take the only path to stop it?

Why not put an end to the misery?

But only a part. And most of us keep that animal caged. We do everything we must to walk the straight line-- to do the right thing.

IF I'VE *LEARNED* ONE THING ABOUT YOU, CONNOR--

--IT'S THAT YOU ARE *TOUGHER* THAN YOU LOOK.

I could ask the doctor about her condition.

But I already know the answer. Jessica is still under sedation to avoid anxiety induced cardiac arrest.

Can't say I'd be any better if I saw the person I love gunned down in front of me, then had my mind essentially raped by a couple of psychic psychos.

I got a taste of what she was going through when I was trying to protect her from them.

The loss. The despair.

But just then, I wasn't seeing it--

--I was feeling it.

AHHHHH...

YOU OKAY?

LET ME GUESS. *BAD DREAM?*

I-I'M FINE.

BUT LOOK AT YOU--

--WELCOME BACK.

I could see it in her eyes. For her, the trauma had subsided-- at least for the moment.

<GLOBAL TRUST OFFICES>>

ME-- I FELT LIKE CRAP.

IT WAS LIKE *I* WAS THE ONE WHO HAD *LOST* EVERYTHING.

THE PAIN WAS *MINE*. THE DESPAIR.

I WAS THE ONE *DROWNING*.

THIS GOES WAY BEYOND ANY *EMPATHETIC* BOND.

IT'S AS IF YOU ACTUALLY TOOK HER *EMOTIONAL STRESS* FROM HER. EASED HER *PSYCHOLOGICAL* PAIN.

UNBELIEVABLE.

YEAH. THAT'S ONE WAY TO DESCRIBE IT.

LOOK, I'M SORRY TO KEEP SHOWING UP LIKE THIS, RANDALL. I KNOW I'M PROBABLY NOT SUPPOSED TO BE *HERE*.

I DON'T MIND, BUT I CAN'T IMAGINE *MCMANUS* IS THRILLED ABOUT IT.

SCREW HIM.

AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, MCMANUS DID EVERYTHING IN HIS POWER TO *RIP* MY MIND APART FOR HIS OWN NEEDS.

YOU-- YOU'RE THE ONE WHO *HELPED* ME PUT IT BACK TOGETHER. AND I WANTED TO THANK YOU FOR THAT.

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

REALLY?

STICK WITH THE *PROGRAM* FOR NOW.

YEAH. DESPITE WHAT MCMANUS DID, I CAN'T IGNORE THE FACT THAT WE STOPPED A LOT OF PEOPLE FROM *DYING*.

THAT'S GOTTA COUNT FOR *SOMETHING*.

I SUPPOSE IT DOES.

AND TO BE HONEST, THAT'S *ALL* I HAVE RIGHT NOW.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF, *CONNOR*.

THANKS.

TRUST

WELL, THAT COULD HAVE BEEN *AWKWARD*.

THINK HE *SENSED* EITHER OF YOU, MALCOLM?

NOT A CHANCE.

HE'S NOT *THAT* SPECIAL.

I'LL HAVE TO TAKE YOUR WORD FOR IT. PERSONALLY, I THINK WE *UNDERESTIMATED* CONNOR.

JUST AS MUCH AS WE *OVERESTIMATED* LUCIEN. I REALLY THOUGHT HE WAS GOING TO HIT HIS *TARGET.*

REGARDLESS, WE GOT WHAT WE NEEDED. THAT WILL DO FOR NOW.

BY THE WAY-- IN EXCHANGE FOR HELPING CONNOR, THE *C.I.A.* GAVE ME A LOOK AT MY *FILE*. IT EVEN CAME WITH *PHOTOS.*

WHAT DO YOU SAY, BOYS?

YOU WANT TO SEE AN OLD PICTURE OF ME AND YOUR *MOTHERS?*

To Be Continued?

SUBJECT: RANDALL WRIGHT
SCRIPT: J.T. KRUL
ARTWORK: LORI "CROSS" HANSON
COLORS: SIYA OUM

PROJECT COBALT

SHIELD

PROJECT COBALT DATA FILES

<NORTHERN CALIFORNIA. 1974.>>

AHHHHHH!

YES! THAT'S IT, *DAWN!*

FEEL THE POWER OF LIFE *BURSTING* FROM YOUR BELLY.

EMBRACE THE *ENERGY* AS YOU RELEASE A *NEW SPIRIT* INTO THIS WORLD.

YES!

OUR *SOULS* ARE SPOILED--- *TAINTED* BY THE DISEASE OF THIS *MODERN* WORLD. WE ARE *TRAPPED.*

TRUE *FREEDOM* IS BEYOND OUR GRASP, BUT WE CAN SHOW OTHERS THE WAY---

---ALLOW THEIR *SPIRIT* TO EXIST *UNCONSTRAINED.*

YES, *RANDALL.* I LOVE YOU.

AND I LOVE YOU.

THIS *CHILD* WILL BE BETTER THAN US. IT WILL BE *PURE.*

AN *ANGEL* AMONG US. MORE *SACRED* AND SPECIAL IN EVERY WAY.

EMBRACE THE *PAIN* FOR IT IS *JOY.*

THE JOY OF *CREATION.*

HNNNG...

PUSH, DAWN.

WAAAAAAAH!

LOOK AT *HER.* SHE'S *BEAUTIFUL.*

SO MUCH *HOPE* AND *PROMISE* WRAPPED IN SUCH A TINY PACKAGE.

HELLO, LITTLE ONE. WE WILL CALL YOU *CHLOE.* YOU ARE GOING TO MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE IN THIS *UNIVERSE.*

TOGETHER, YOU AND YOUR *BROTHERS* WILL *CHANGE* THIS *WORLD!*

HALLELUJAH!

HALLELUJAH!

HALLELUJAH!

HALLELUJAH!

HALLELUJAH!

THANKS EVERYONE!

J.T.